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MAGAZINE

100TH ISSUE!

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine Issue 100 (January 2006)

THE ESSENTIAL 100

THE PLAYSTATION 1, PLAYSTATION 2, AND PSP GAMES YOU MUST PLAY BEFORE YOU DIE

+

THE OPM INTERVIEW

WE TALK NEXT-GEN WITH SONY'S KAZ HIRAI AND MICROSOFT'S J ALLARD

OVER 45 GAMES REVIEWED

10 GAMES TO WATCH FOR IN 2006

WIN ALL 100 GAMES

DETAILS PAGE 135

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ISSUE 100

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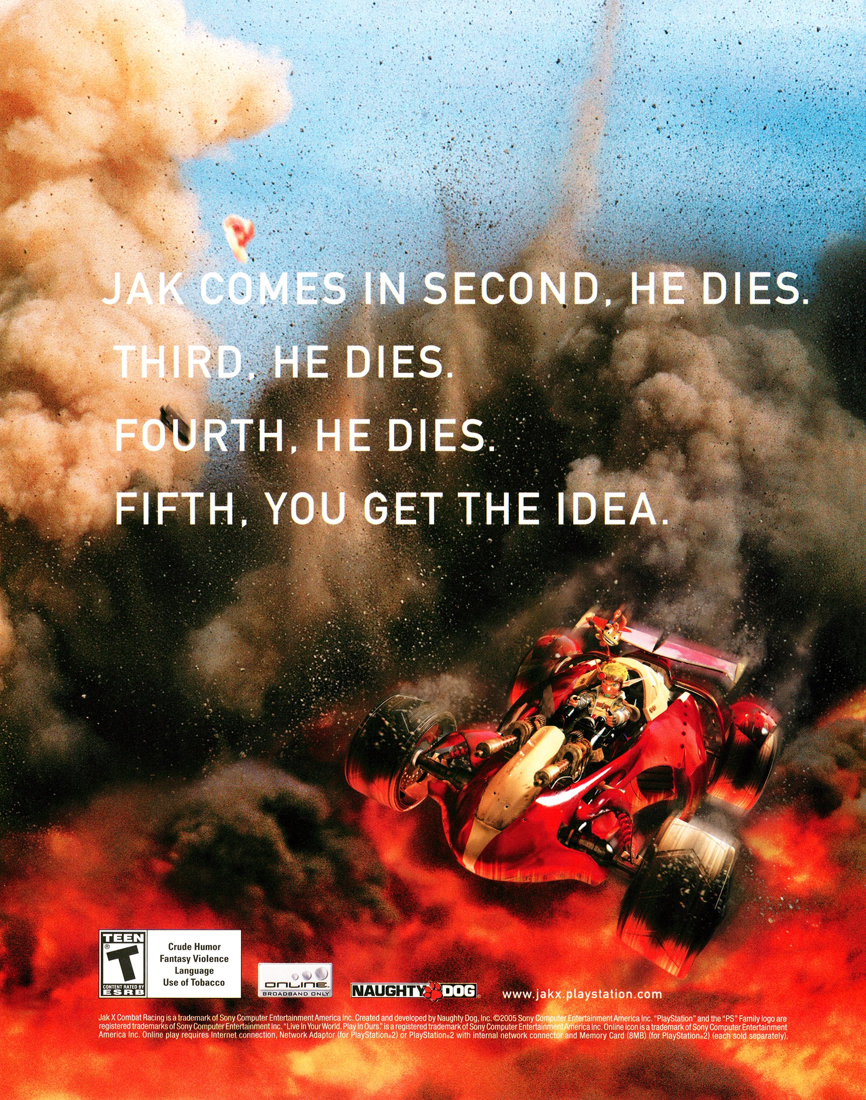
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THIRD, HE DIES.
FOURTH, HE DIES.
FIFTH, YOU GET THE IDEA.
TEEN
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NAUGHTY DOG

Crude Humor
Fantasy Violence
Language
Use of Tobacco

www.jakx.playstation.com

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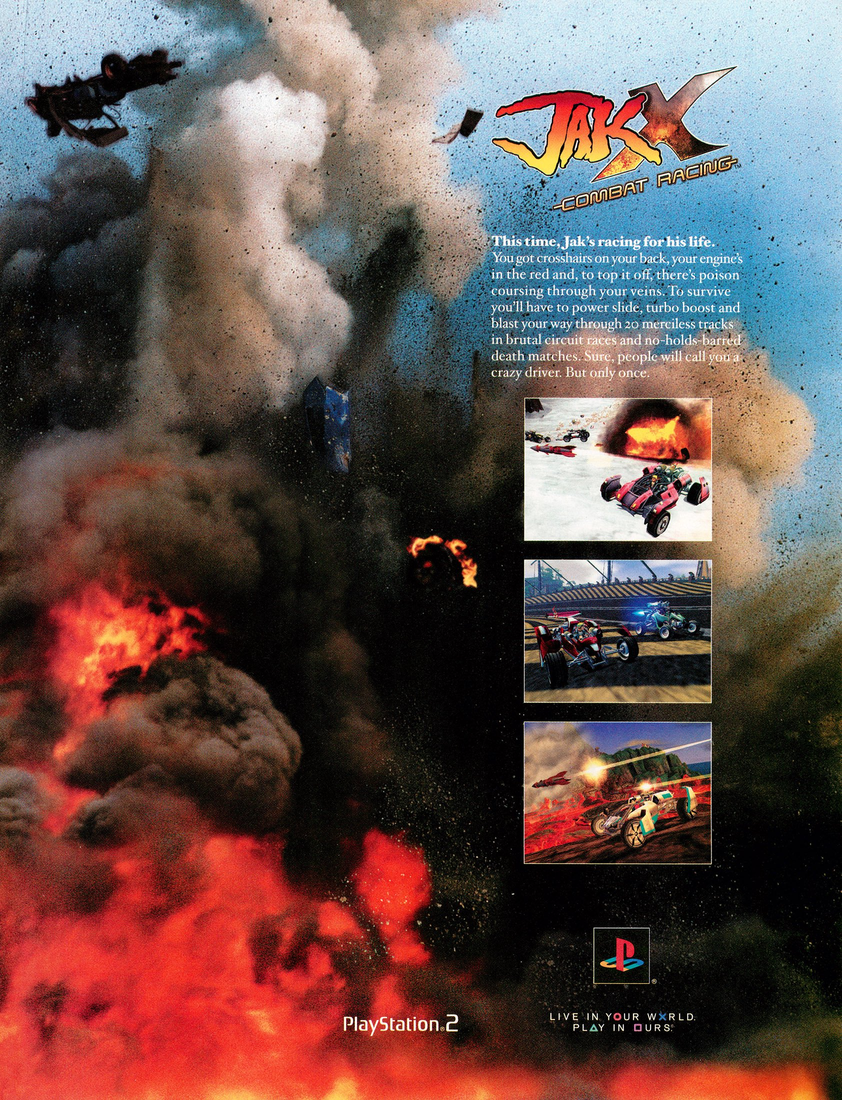
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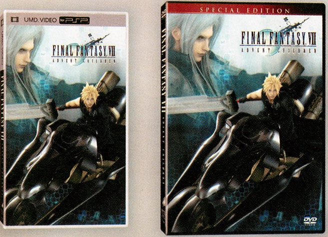
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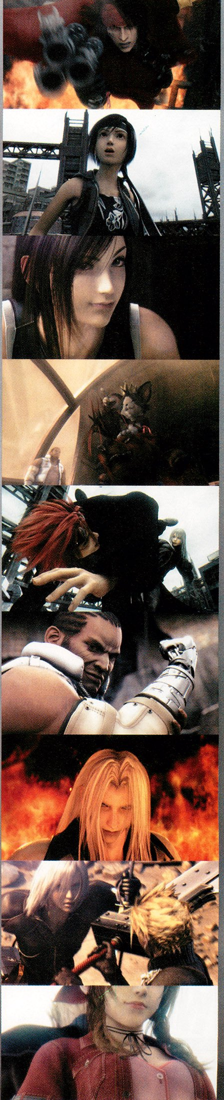

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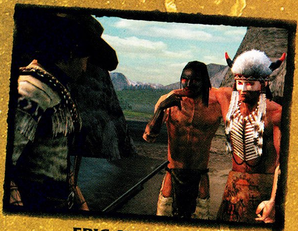

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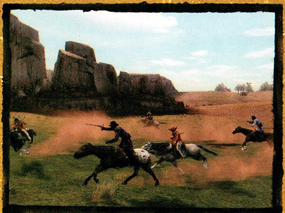

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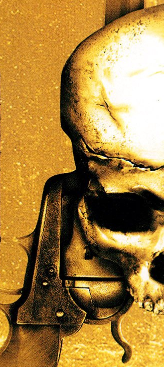

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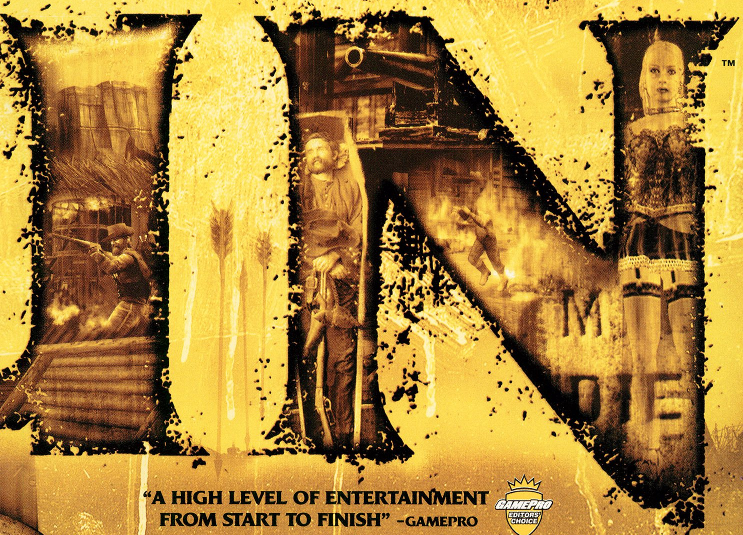

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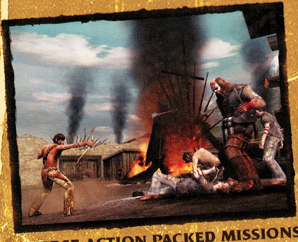

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C Roper
D Roper
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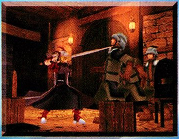
ENEMY A
ENEMY B



A Gomorrah Toad
B Gomorrah Toad
C Sexton
D Sexton
1987
1418
2310
1445
ENEMY C
ENEMY B
ENEMY D

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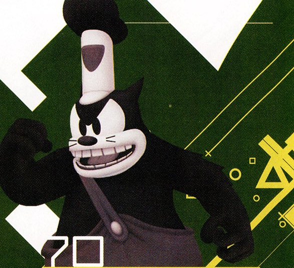

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Give a little bit, give a little bit of your love to us at opm@ziffdavis.com.

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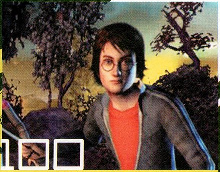

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OPM.1UP.COM

Oh, the Internet—birthplace of the ORLY owls and home to hilarious digitally altered photos, videos of people in *Looney Tunes*–like situations, l33t speak, and 1UP.com, where you can get all of the latest news on the world of videogames. While you're there—after you're done checking out our interviews with Microsoft's J Allard and Sony's Kaz Hirai—why not look at consolewar.1UP.com, where you can get all of the details on the three next-generation systems, their games, and all of the 1UP clubs dedicated to them. If that's not enough to get you excited for the upcoming consoles, then you're either dead or perfectly happy with the current and previous generations, in which case, you should keep an eye on OPM.1UP.com for video of the *OPM* editor-in-chief roundtable, as well as full transcripts from interviews that are just too meaty and juicy to fit, in their entirety, within the pages of the magazine. It'll be just like reading them in the magazine, only now you can read them while watching a video of someone getting attacked by penguins at the same time.

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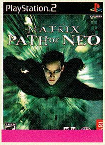
ON THE DVD

ROUND DISCS ARE FULL OF GOODNESS

WELCOME TO OUR WORLD

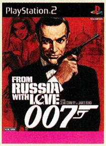
There's only one magazine that can provide you with the awesomeness of PlayStation 2 demos—and that's the *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*, which you're holding right here in your hands. This month, the demo disc fairies have outdone themselves by packing 12 entire demos onto the disc. Pretend that you're the Chosen One as you play as Neo in *The Matrix: Path of Neo*. Practice your skills of suavity as the cool James Bond (aka Sean Connery). And see if you can please the King of All Cosmos—you can even bring a friend along to help you! All this and tons more await you. After all, your gaming wishes are our command.

PLAY IT!


PlayStation 2
MATRIX PATH OF NEO

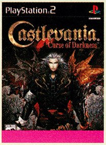
THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO

One pill, two pill, red pill, blue pill—do you like green strings of spam? Sample an early level of the game in this demo.


PlayStation 2
FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE 007

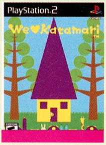
007: FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

Sean Connery reprises his role in this remake of the Bond film, complete with classic weapons and gorgeous women!


PlayStation 2
Castlevania Curse of Darkness

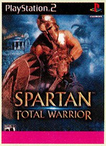
CASTLEVANIA: CURSE OF DARKNESS

Hector ain't happy, because somebody killed his girlfriend. Travel to Dracula's castle in this latest *Castlevania* offering.


PlayStation 2
We ♥ Katamari

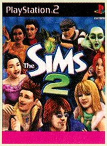
WE LOVE KATAMARI

It's no secret that we love *Katamari*—and you should too! Grab a friend, get rolling, and take this demo for a spin!


PlayStation 2
SPARTAN TOTAL WARRIOR

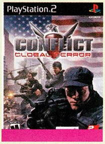
SPARTAN: TOTAL WARRIOR

Think part *Dynasty Warriors* and part *God of War* and you will have an idea of what *Spartan: Total Warrior* is all about.


PlayStation 2
The SIMS 2

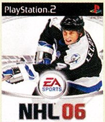
THE SIMS 2

If the world were a blank canvas, how would you fill it in? Check out the story mode in this demo and control your Sim's life.


PlayStation 2
CONFLICT GLOBAL TERROR

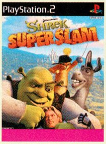
CONFLICT: GLOBAL TERROR

Bad guys = bad situation. Take control of a quick response counterterrorist unit and teach those bad guys a lesson.


PlayStation 2
EA SPORTS
NHL 06

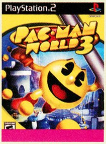
NHL 2006

Maneuver around defensemen and make goalies dizzy before snapping off dangerous slapshots in this demo of *NHL 06*!


PlayStation 2
SHREK SUPER SLAM

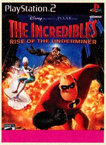
SHREK SUPERSLAM

Get a taste of what you can expect in this free-for-all fighting game featuring Shrek, Donkey, Puss 'N' Boots, and Prince Charming.


PlayStation 2
PAC-MAN WORLD 3

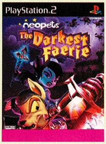
PAC-MAN WORLD 3

Our favorite yellow dot will be turning 25 years old. Help us celebrate with this demo of *Pac-Man World 3*. Wocka-wocka-wocka!


PlayStation 2
THE INCREDIBLES
RISE OF THE UNDERMINER

THE INCREDIBLES: RISE OF THE UNDERMINER

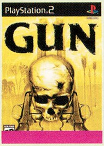
Play out what happens after the movie as Mr. Incredible and Frozone return to battle the Underminer.


PlayStation 2
neopets
The Darkest Faerie

NEOPETS: THE DARKEST FAERIE

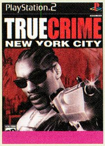
Sample the adventures of Tor and Roberta and free the world of Neopia from all sorts of evil-mongering ne'er-do-wells.

WATCH IT!


PlayStation.2
GUN

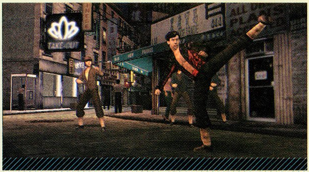
GUN

So you wanna be a cowboy? Glimpse into the untamed West with this trailer and sample Colton's story of betrayal, greed, and revenge.


PlayStation.2
TRUE CRIME
NEW YORK CITY

TRUE CRIME: NEW YORK CITY

Bust criminals, take down gangs, search and seize, extort, interrogate, and dispense justice as a rogue cop in NYC.



PLUS, CHECK OUT...

The story of *Jak X* continues in a behind-the-scenes look at Naughty Dog's latest creation, Rockstar exposes the magic that goes into adapting a cult-classic film like *The Warriors* to a videogame format, and we've provided a save-game file for *Mobile Suit Gundam: Gundam vs. Zeta Gundam*. Enjoy!

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COMING NEXT MONTH

PLAY IT!

- 24: THE GAME
- BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT
- HEROES OF THE PACIFIC
- FIFA 2006
- WINNING ELEVEN 9 INTERNATIONAL
- SOCOM 3

WATCH IT!

- TEEN TITANS
- WILD ARMS 4
- APE ESCAPE 3
- THE SIMS 2
- SOUL CALIBUR III
- SHADOW OF THE HEDGEHOG
- METAL GEAR SOLID 4

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ISSUE 101
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DISC PROBLEMS?

Did you buy a copy of our magazine that did not contain a demo DVD? Simply send the receipt in an envelope marked "OPM Replacement Disc" to OPM Disc Producer, Ziff Davis Media, 101 2nd Street, San Francisco, CA 94105, with the name and address of the store plus your phone number and address and we'll send you the disc. Make sure you specify which month the corresponding disc belongs to in order to ensure you get the right one.

If you have a malfunctioning or nonworking demo disc, call EDS at 1-800-627-6458. They will provide instructions to obtain repair or replacement services.

Sony Computer Entertainment America (SCEA) warrants to the original purchaser of the Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine that the demo disc included is free from defects in material and workmanship for a period of ninety (90) days from the date of purchase. SCEA agrees for a period of ninety (90) days to either repair or replace, at its option, the SCEA product. You must call EDS at 1-800-627-6458 to receive instructions to obtain repair/replacement services. This warranty shall not be applicable and shall be void if the defect in the SCEA product has arisen through abuse, unreasonable use, mistreatment, neglect, or breakage during shipment. THIS WARRANTY IS IN LIEU OF ALL OTHER WARRANTIES AND NO OTHER REPRESENTATIONS OR CLAIMS OF ANY NATURE SHALL BE BINDING ON OR OBLIGATE SCEA. ANY IMPLIED WARRANTIES APPLICABLE TO THIS SOFTWARE PRODUCT, INCLUDING WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY AND FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE, ARE LIMITED TO THE NINETY (90) DAY PERIOD DESCRIBED ABOVE. IN NO EVENT WILL SCEA BE LIABLE FOR INCIDENTAL OR CONSEQUENTIAL DAMAGES RESULTING FROM POSSESSION, USE, OR MALFUNCTION OF THE SCEA SOFTWARE PRODUCT. Some states do not allow limitations as to how long an implied warranty lasts and/or exclusions or limitations of consequential damages, so the above limitations and/or exclusions of liability may not apply to you. This warranty gives you specific legal rights, and you may also have other rights that vary from state to state.

100 AND COUNTING

THAT'S NEARLY EIGHT AND A HALF IN HUMAN YEARS

Hitting our 100th issue couldn't come at a better time. The PS2 is still peaking, the PSP is on the cusp of, well, something, and the PS3 is oh so close. It's an exhilarating time and makes us feel young again.

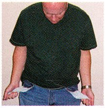
Putting our youthful energy to good use, we've done some special things this issue. We've tweaked our overall look, moved a few things around, and expanded Input to make it more of a readers' section. This issue marks the formal debut of "*OPM* Interview." Each month, expect a major chat with a major figure (or figures) in the PlayStation world.

We're particularly proud of our cover feature: The Essential 100. Read it and feel the sense of history and passion that PlayStation gaming brings out in people—and then see if you can win all the games listed (contest info is on page 136).

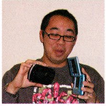
On behalf of *OPM*, thank you for being with us through our first 100. Join us as we push on to our 200th and beyond. | *Tom Byron*

THE OPM FAMILY

DANA JONGEWAARD
feels youthful again thanks to all the kiddie games she reviewed this month. Now she knows that instead of blowing money on expensive moisturizing creams, all one really needs is a few quality hours playing titles such as *Neopets: The Darkest Faerie.*



JOE RYBICKI
made the second-biggest decision of his life this month: He bought himself a house. Look for him soon on the streets of San Francisco, singing "Total Eclipse of the Heart" ad nauseam for spare change to cover the mortgage payments.



THIERRY NGUYEN
is a filthy traitor, as he's gone and bought himself a Nintendo DS, so he can play little kiddie games. He spends hours pitting the DS, PSP, and Gizmondo against one another in a portable thunderdome, complete with a Tina Turner standee.

GIANCARLO VARANINI
is living in a constant state of fear after conducting an interview with Microsoft's J Allard. Reports of Sony's ninjas being sent on a special assassination mission have been intercepted. Needless to say, sleep is no longer an option.

LOGAN PARR
has finally put away all those *Star Wars* action figures scattered across his cube, but now we can't tear him away from *Battlefront II*! He keeps rambling on about his mission and the secret plans. We say there needs to be an intervention...and soon!

NINJA
72
WARRIOR
35

RYAN VULK
is still living it up in the *Final Fantasy XI* realm, roaming around the world of Vana'diel with an underleveled warrior sub. Why, you ask? Because being l33t is sooo last year. His philosophy is "screw the norm"—getting higher takes too much work.

ALEJANDRO CHAVETTA
has decided that he wants to be a pop star after way too many marathon sessions of *American Idol* viewing. His breakout hit: a sequel to the vastly underrated "99 Luftballons," oh so cleverly entitled "100 Grünerballons."

GREG FORD
is inspired by *The Warriors* on multiple levels, not the least of which is a level of fashion. In fact, he has decided that he is going to abandon his Bostonian ways in favor of a groovy street-fighting look. He figures his love of baseball should come in handy for those brawls.

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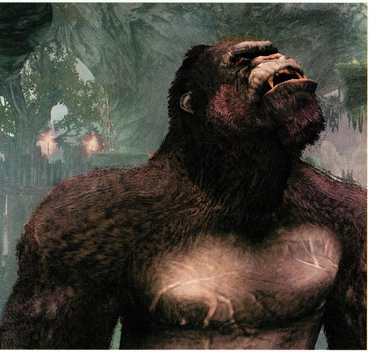
INPUT

THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE...OR WHATEVER



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LETTER OF THE MONTH

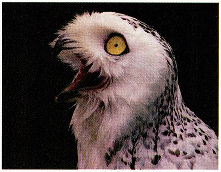
My excitement has been building to a fever pitch over *Peter Jackson's King Kong*, both the movie and game, and it took a huge leap last month when you announced that the December issue would feature a demo. True enough, in the final days of October I opened my mailbox to find the December issue with the wondrous demo disc enclosed. There was only one problem.

I live in South Florida, and since that @#$! Hurricane Wilma visited us, I have been living the life of a Skull Islander. That's right, the power is out, and the utility tells me I may not have it on again until November 22! Do you have any idea what one week, much less four, with no PlayStation can do to a person?! And now you heap derision on my dilemma by delivering this desirous disc!

By the way, I'm writing this from work, where the power is back on as of a week after the storm. My next task is to come up with a business case for bringing the PlayStation and the disc here.

Anthony Borchers
Boca Raton, FL

Sorry about the bad luck, Anthony. We'd try and make you feel better by telling you King Kong *is much worse now that we've reviewed it...but we'd be lying.*



WIPED-OUT WORDS OF WISDOM

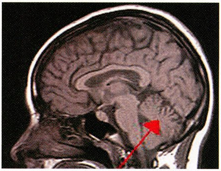
Remember that PS2 demo disc insanity when people had their memory cards wiped clean if they played the demo disc with their memory card in the PS2? Well, even though Sony was nice and gave out free games and compensation, from then on out I never play the demo disc without taking my memory card out first. I'm not the only paranoid demo-disc player, am I? Our data is way too precious to risk!

Scott Whitmore
Via e-mail

Thanks for the sage advice. Sony and OPM have worked closely to ensure that the demo disc is always of the highest quality—but it never hurts to be cautious.

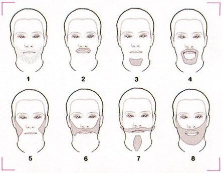
PS3 INTERNET SAVVY?

I missed out on going online with my PS2, but I'm definitely planning on going online next generation. Thus, my question: Since the PS3 has (or should have, at least) integrated network support, would that mean I could insert a USB wireless network adapter into one of the USB ports on the console so that it could respond to my wireless router? I know for the PS2 you need a peripheral; you put one end in the Network Adaptor Ethernet port and another in the router Ethernet port, and it transmits wirelessly. But I figure I'll just wait for the PS3 to go online.



Kunal Mehta
Via e-mail

Sony is so secretive about PS3 info that it actually has a locked briefcase handcuffed to the wrist of one poor schmuck named Earl Stanby. Prominently displayed on the side is a small adhesive note that reads, "Answer to Kunal Mehta's question." Until Sony either releases that info or we go Jack Bauer on poor Earl and saw his hand off, we can't answer your question.



SO NOT PC OF US

Hey *OPM*, I love your magazine so very much! I've been a subscriber for about a year and can't wait for the next issue! Anyways, does it ever annoy you guys and girls when magazines like *PC Gamer* talk lots of crap about consoles? Personally, I think consoles are better in that they are cheaper, have a better selection of games, and don't require a $500 upgrade for every new game. Does it irk you when they talk crap, or do you just brush it off?

Asa Anderson
Via e-mail

We brush it off. No matter what PC fellows say, we can take comfort in knowing that they will always remain significantly bearded.

VIDEO KILLED OUR PRINT STAR

Hey, guys. I've always wondered if you ever thought of putting in video reviews. I really like to watch them. You could include some in an issue and put a poll up on the site to see if people like them and then possibly continue. Well, just a suggestion.

Tom France
Via e-mail

Yo, *OPM*, if you're low on content for a demo disc one month, then maybe you could include some video reviews. Then we can see the great graphics, intense speed, and the awesome sounds if the game doesn't have a demo.

Travis Hall
San Francisco

Ye gods, man, are both of you crazy? You think the idea sounds cool now, but believe us, you

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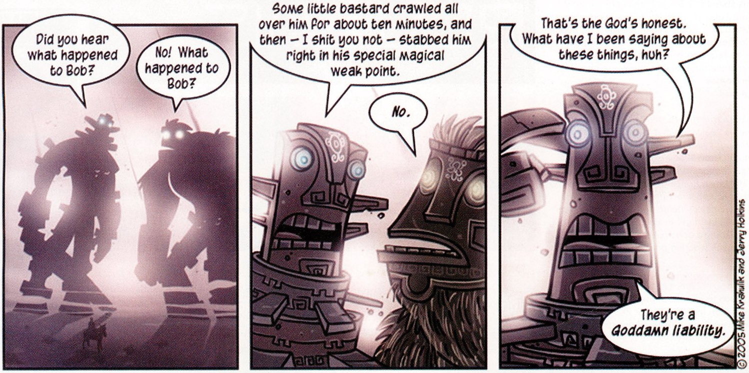

Did you hear what happened to Bob?
No! What happened to Bob?
Some little bastard crawled all over him for about ten minutes, and then – I shit you not – stabbed him right in his special magical weak point.
No.
That's the God's honest. What have I been saying about these things, huh?
They're a Goddamn liability.
© 2005 Mike Krahulik and Jerry Holkins

GAMERS ARE TALKING ABOUT

STRAIGHT FROM THE OPM MESSAGE BOARDS

ROCKING OUT WITH GUITAR HERO

Magicthighs shares his joy: "I just died and went to gaming heaven. Why? Because I just got done jamming with *Guitar Hero* for over an hour. Believe the reviews, it's that damn good. I highly recommend this game to anybody with a pulse. Gamer or nongamer, it doesn't matter. To top it off, it has a killer soundtrack, and simply put, it is the most fun I've ever had playing a game."

ohJTBehaaave adds, "One thing they should have done is given it online play. They say you can hook up a second guitar and trade off riffs with another player doing different parts of the song. Why couldn't they make an online mode where you competed with an opponent? Just like Ralph Macchio versus Steve Vai in the movie *Crossroads*."

AuroraBlade quips, "On a completely different note, does 'Ace of Spades' bother the ever-living crap out of anybody else but me? I freakin' love the original Motorhead song but without Lemmy on vocals, it just doesn't 'feel' right. I'll still play the song to heck when I get my copy, but it just doesn't do the original justice."

COLOSSAL SHADOWS

hydraMIRAGE describes his experience with *Shadow of the Colossus*: "The environments are well done, though it takes a minute or so to get used to the controls. The scale of these colossi never ceases to amaze me, and I must say I did get stepped on by the first one and almost flattened with a humongous sword by the third one. I can't wait to see what else this game has in store."

The wise **Jedi_dad** also muses, "So far, I like it. I'd love it if it weren't for the camera going buck wild at inopportune moments. So I'm just liking it right now. I've downed two colossi so far. I don't know what's up with the black smoke tendrils yet, and the way they laugh at me after I murder those beasts gives me pause."

The ever-so-surly **LuminousAether** proclaims, "Oh, and the game beats the crap out of *Ico* in every single imaginable way."

To which **Fox-Brutus** replies, "To say it beats the crap out of *Ico* is a damn lie. It is much more mainstream (not meant in a bad way; it's just a more accessible game), it is longer, and overall I guess it is better, but not in all respects! *Ico* still has it beat on story and control!"

don't want to expose yourself to the gibbering, saliva-generating, profanity-bursting mess that passes for Scooter's speech.

18 AND OLDER ONLY

In your *Rockman Rockman* article [*OPM* #99], it was stated that Mega Man is older than the majority of gamers today. In many previous *OPM* articles, it was stated that most gamers are in their mid-20s or older. Do you equip your writers with some sort of alien-technology mental-inhibitor when they are hired?

John Grybos
Via e-mail

While it's true that the average PlayStation gamer is 22 years old, it is precisely that: the average. If you speak the language of maths, then you know that it is perfectly possible to have a crapload more kids who don't remember The Fresh Prince of Bel Air *growing up than guys who know the Voltron transformation sequence by heart, and still get a 22-year-old as the average. Besides, this is videogame journalism; we don't have the budget to equip writers with working pens, much less mental-inhibitors.*

WHA—?

In regards to Issue #99, page 42: Is that what I think it is on the "November 2K5" calendar?! I don't care if this question goes to print. I just want to know what the f*** it is! I think

I know, and at age 33 and married, I should know, but I just want to know if I'm wrong!

Joe Hinnebush
Via e-mail

Indeed.

WRONG OLYMPIAD! DUH!

In your Issue #99 article "Trendspotter," you listed a number of large characters from games. Well, I'm just being picky here, but you guys said Colossus is the statue of Zeus from Sophitia's stage, which it isn't. Anyone who has played Sophitia's, Lizardman's, or Cassandra's story mode would know that it is the statue of Hephaestus, whom they worship. I know, I know, that isn't superimportant, but you guys usually have your facts straight on these things. And as a *Soul Calibur* fan, it really bugged me. Please check things like this so you don't get nerded at by people like me.

Mark Pigeon
Via e-mail

Two thoughts spring to mind immediately:
1) People read this magazine?!
2) People pay attention to the Soul Calibur *backstory?!*

READER REVIEWS

PLEASANT SURPRISES

SLY COOPER 3: HONOR AMONG THIEVES

WHAT YOU SAID

"I very rarely play platformers anymore, and I really never wanted to play any of the *Sly Cooper* games. I thought it was just another cutesy platformer, but I played the demo and really liked it. This game has nice graphics and great humor (especially when Bentley does an opera battle against Octavio). The 3D glasses are really uncomfortable and seem pointless, but that's just a minor flaw that can be overcome. But overall it is a very well-made game, and I highly recommend it be purchased." | Austyn Conroy

READER SCORE 5|5

WHAT WE SAID

"Though on this, the third time around, the game's template is starting to feel a tad formulaic, it's still a formula that works well, and fans of the series should be well pleased."

OPM SCORE 4.5|5

MORTAL KOMBAT: SHAOLIN MONKS

WHAT YOU SAID

"Ever since its move to the PS2, Midway has worked on improving the once-tired *Mortal Kombat* series. When Midway announced it was releasing a new platform/action/adventure game, I quickly knew it would be better than previous attempts (*MK Mythologies: Sub-Zero* and *MK: Special Forces*), and upon playing the game I knew I was correct. With a great kombat system and ko-op additions, this game really does push the series forward, and with many unlockable features, it comes with a high replay value. However, it is not without flaws. My first complaint is that once you play through the game the first time, it can get very repetitive the next couple of times through. My other complaint is that with so many character models in the game (Raiden, Sonya, Mileena, Jade, Kano, Jax), Midway really should've considered putting all of them into the versus mode, instead of the mere eight it included." | Clayton Younkin

READER SCORE 4|5

WHAT WE SAID

"*Shaolin Monks* is just plain old fun. Of course, the game's simplistic look and occasionally spotty camera might be turnoffs for some, but the pure fun the game provides easily overrides these shortcomings."

OPM SCORE 4|5

Want to have your say about a recent game? Send your review (don't forget the score!) to opm@ziffdavis.com with the subject "READER REVIEW."

BLOG OF THE MONTH

"This is where my epiphany comes into play. Lying in bed at 2:30 a.m., finally content and ready to fall asleep, I finally realized that hey, the critics were right for criticizing the PSP's failure to follow up on its launch, and hey, the PSP's software lineup really isn't that good right now, and hey!, I really should have waited to buy it. This realization was especially bitter because for the past three months I've been steadfastly defending the PSP, claiming it to be the best handheld system of all time, period, that its lineup really is great, and that my money was well spent. My eyes had finally opened, and the ever-bright light of truth truly stung.

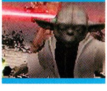
Now, through all of this, I still find that I loyally love my PSP."

Adam Lee
Sesamechicken.1UP.com

CLUB OF THE MONTH

Do you totally love *Star Wars*? These guys do. They also give each other cool tips on playing *Star Wars Battlefront II*, between posts about how awesome it was when Darth Vader went "NOOOOOOO!"

Star Wars Battlefront II Club
Battlefront2-club.1UP.com



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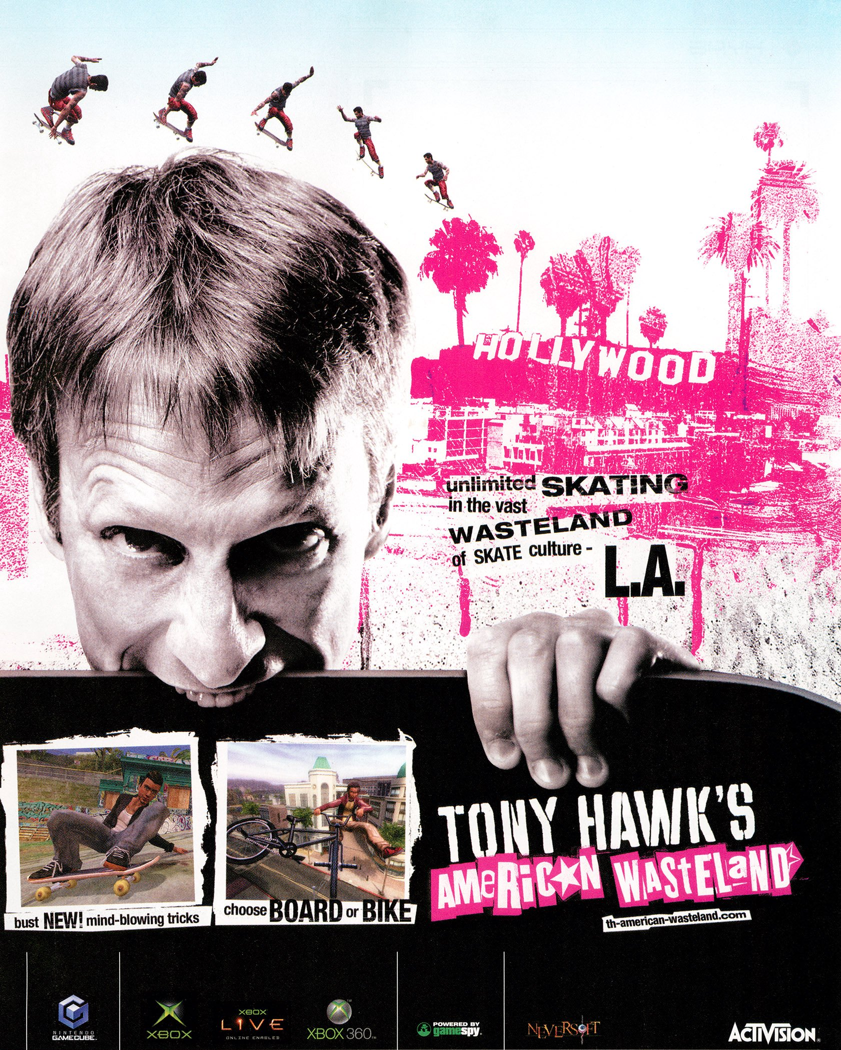
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PREVIEWS AND NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF PLAYSTATION

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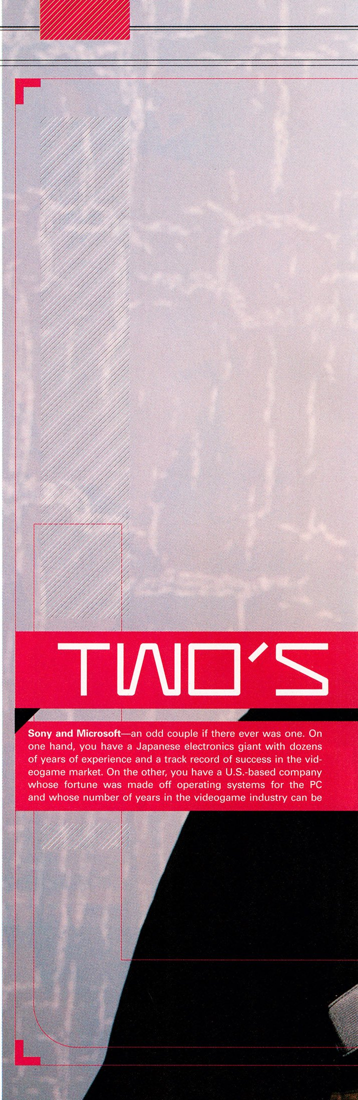

TWO'S

Sony and Microsoft—an odd couple if there ever was one. On one hand, you have a Japanese electronics giant with dozens of years of experience and a track record of success in the videogame market. On the other, you have a U.S.-based company whose fortune was made off operating systems for the PC and whose number of years in the videogame industry can be

COMPANY

counted on a single hand. But if you think the next-generation console wars are going to be one-sided, think again. We spoke with J Allard, corporate vice president of Microsoft, and Kaz Hirai, president of Sony Computer Entertainment America, to get the details on the next generation and how consumers will ultimately be the winners.

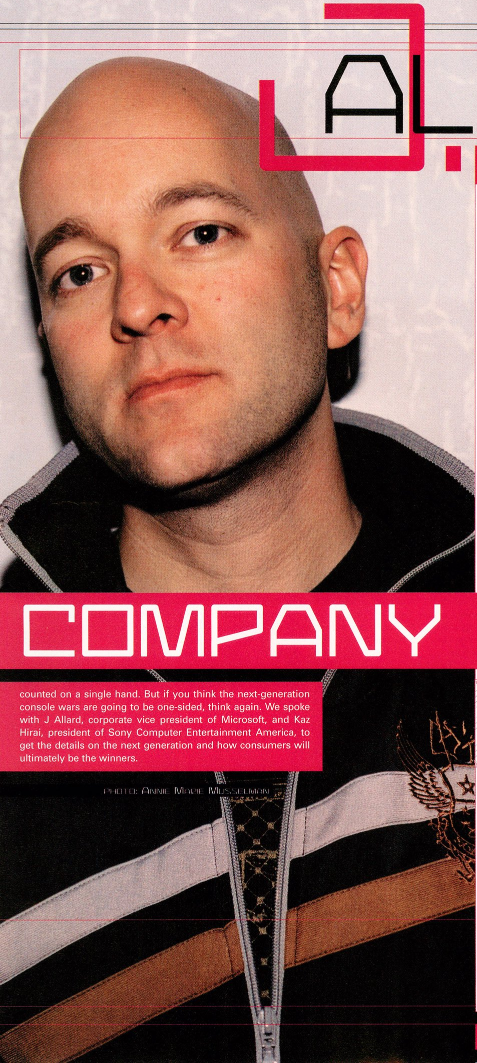

PHOTO: ANNIE MARIE MUSSELMAN

J. ALLARD

THE MAN WHO HAS TAKEN CONSOLE ENTERTAINMENT LIVE

OPM What do you think of the whole idea of granting an interview to a PlayStation magazine?

J ALLARD I think it's great. Congratulations on the 100th issue. I'm still a reader and have been for a long time, so I'm glad [to do it]. From the broadest point of view, one thing that bums me out about the videogame industry is that we've developed these camps or factions when we're all gamers. Whether you're making games, talking about games, or anything else, the factions we create can be a little unhealthy. We're not as grown-up [in this regard] as music, movies, or television [are], so that holds us back a bit.

OPM Right, we see the division between Microsoft and Sony, but beyond that, we see divisions in things like online strategies, specifically with regards to Xbox Live, and we have to wonder why Sony isn't following suit to make its own online service better.

JA We started Xbox as an intrinsic part of the dream. We believed that [console] gaming was going to shift to online much like PCs shifted to online, and we wanted to be the catalyst for it, so we designed the hardware and programs, staffed the team, and baked things into the budget. Our blood flowed online before we even had a team or product. That's probably the biggest thing that has helped make Xbox Live so successful, [the fact] that we didn't separate it from the hardware. We didn't separate it from the development tools or first-party development. Instead, we said online is going to be a part of everything we do. If we make a first-party racing game, it's going to be online, and when you see the sales brochure, it's going to talk about online. When you go to a developers' conference, we're going to talk about online.

The second biggest thing is that we're an online company. We don't outsource our Web stuff. We build our own website, and we have a lot of talent on the team and, more broadly, around the company. We have a lot of assets like the Passport security service and microtransactions that we'll be using in Xbox 360. That's a material advantage for us. Sony's advantage is that, in their company culture, hardware is their strongest, most developed muscle, so they do things like the shrunken-down PS2. That's something that comes very naturally to them, and I think online is something that comes very naturally to us.

> "WE BELIEVED THAT [CONSOLE] GAMING WAS GOING TO SHIFT TO ONLINE MUCH LIKE PCS SHIFTED TO ONLINE."

OPM The funny thing is, though, that people generally don't like paying extra for things. Sony's model, in which users don't have to pay an extra fee, on paper seems like it would have an advantage over Xbox Live, a service where users do have to pay an extra fee. Why are people so willing to embrace Xbox Live?

JA It's a quality thing. Back in the day, there was a thing called cable TV. It basically offered better reception with the same channels. It had HBO, ESPN, and MTV, which really helped it catch on and bring it to the mainstream, but before those channels were

ONLINE RELIGION
While its single-player experience may leave something to be desired, *Halo 2*s multiplayer mode is nearly flawless since all of its features work almost seamlessly within the Xbox Live environment. Will Sony have an answer for this kind of experience on PlayStation 3?

available, people bought it for the reception. [Consumers wanted] a higher-quality [picture], and that was a big part of the value, so people were willing to pay for it. Who on earth would pay for a better NBC, ABC, or CBS? Turns out millions of people would. Similarly, with Live, we offer a higher-quality experience, and people are willing to pay for it. From the outset, we said every game was going to have [voice chat]. We said you're going to have one identity, and that identity is going to be the same for every game, so anything you attach to that identity—whether it's the reputation you have online, the friends you have online, or your online preferences—we're going to tie all of that up.

We can also put an enormous emphasis—and we can because it's a managed network—around cheating. We didn't want [Xbox Live] to be an environment where people could spoil it for each other. Whether it's hackers or gamers driving around the track backward, we're going to put some walls up to make it safe [for gamers who play fair]. Something you see in PC gaming is a lot of cheating, and it takes a very small number of spoilsports to ruin it for everyone else. So we tried to learn from that and apply it vigorously to [Xbox Live].

We've made good on our promises, and people are happy. We also have a strong commitment from our first-party team—*Halo 2* being the biggest showcase, for sure—but a lot of people found an enormous amount of replay value and enjoyment from [our first-party] games, whether it's *Project Gotham Racing 2, Halo 2, Forza Motorsport*, or any of the XSN Sports games.

I got online the other night to play *PGR2* with a guy who just flat-out demolished me. I haven't taken that disc out of the drive since the day we shipped it. I probably have around 800 hours on this thing. A situation like that—well, gee, if a kid spends 40 or 50 bucks on a title and then 50 bucks on a subscription, he or she's in for 100 bucks, but they've also played it for over a year. That's enormous value. Typically, a gamer like that would go out and buy five racing games to get a fix.

OPM So, obviously, someone who walks into the store or someone who's familiar with Xbox Live realizes it's a pretty good value, but what's the attraction for developers? Companies like Electronic Arts took some time before jumping onto Xbox Live, because EA wants to control the online experience.

JA You have to separate the developers to begin with. Smaller developers just can't think about managing servers, credit cards, and worldwide tax issues. There are a number of things you need to deal with to build an online service where you're connecting client software to servers around the world—it's very complex. Even the [midsized] developers that could do it think Xbox Live is a godsend. Very big companies are a little more thoughtful in their decision process. It generally takes them longer to commit to new ideas. EA also has a big team of server people, and the majority of their software is multiplatform. So when they're making a game like *Madden* or *FIFA* with online capabilities, and one company can solve most of their problems—let's just say 90 percent—but we only solved it on one platform, they had to think very hard [about] how they could deliver the very best experience for [both] a PlayStation customer and an Xbox customer.

OPM When Microsoft launched Xbox Live, it was pushed hard as an online gaming service, but we've seen a few innovations since then that have garnered it even more attention. Are you surprised at all at how much a part of gaming culture Xbox Live has become?

JA Not at all; that's why we believed in it. It used to be that you went to a store, you bought a console and a videogame cartridge, and then your experience was limited to whomever you could fit on your couch in that room. If you got a high score, it might've been remembered on the game cartridge, but most likely you wrote it down on a pad of paper because you passed the cartridge around to your friends. Now we're inviting you into the world. It's not just about the manufacturers or the game creators. It's about the players, too. If your aspiration is to be the No. 1 racer in the world, you get to see where you rank and work on that. If your aspiration is to go meet new people that share common interests, you can do that.

> "IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT MANUFACTURERS OR GAME CREATORS. IT'S ABOUT PLAYERS, TOO."

So, we want to invite the community and say, "Look, when you go to the store and buy an Xbox, an Xbox game, and an Xbox Live subscription, it's not just about what we can give you, but it's what you can give back to the community."

OPM Is there any concern that there's too much being integrated into the next generation of Xbox Live, since simplicity seems to be a big factor in its success?

JA It's hard to say since we haven't shipped yet. I've been playing with it for three months, as have most of the people on the team who are trying to work the kinks out. I've earned 450 points online—the total score I've earned online across all games. I've earned a bunch of these points and achievements. It's going to be an emotional moment when we erase all of that when the service goes live and everyone starts from zero. I'm going to lose all that progress, so I have to jump back into the games and earn all of that back. On one hand, you can worry about us doing too much. On the other hand, I've played it for three months as a gamer and it's awesome. It remembers everything that I've done. It's basically my save-game history. It's preserved forever, [even if you just rent a game].

I still have PS1 memory units with my *GT* scores and cars in the garage [on them]. I never bring them back out, but with Live, we're going to remember all of that—if you conquered that racing game, it's going to remember that forever. Is

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there a concern we've done too much? Maybe. We've done an awful lot. The good news about doing too much is that in a community setting like this, it's the community that will decide what is important. Maybe I'm the only human being excited about keeping my score and the badge concept, and we'll find that out and change our focus [appropriately]. We have too many paid subscribers, and the paid part is important. They're paying us money, and the feedback they give us is very good. I talk to our customers every day. I just put on a headset and go play games, and they tell me what they like and what they don't like. It's [not like] the surveys these people do online where people could lie. I'm talking to guys that really pay for Live and say things like, "I really wish..." or "How do we get that guy off the system?" So I've been collecting feedback just from playing the last few years.

Flipping it back to PlayStation, I hope there are a lot of people at Sony that have Xboxes and Live accounts and are listening to what gamers want. It's much better than doing Web surveys. If they don't have Live accounts and they need one or some games, just have them call me and I'll send them over, because it's a great way to find out what the customer and the community wants.

OPM It's clear Microsoft doesn't just think of Xbox Live as simply a business, but rather as a part of gaming. That seems to show not only how Microsoft markets Xbox Live, but also how yourself and other members of the Xbox team present it. Sony doesn't necessarily present online the same way.
JA You think that's going to change with the PS3? It feels like they're forced to talk about it more reactively. Phil Harrison seems to have stated on a few occasions in interviews that Sony is going to be more committed to it next round. You feel like they're coming around to it?

OPM Seems that way, but sometimes it doesn't seem like Sony knows how to approach it, because, as you say, it's not an online company.
JA I'll give them a road map. [*Laughs*] One piece of feedback we've gotten from large and small publishers alike is, "Boy, we'd love to have Xbox Live on PlayStation." My response has always been, "[SCE President Ken Kutaragi] has my number and I'd be happy to talk [with him] about it." It's damaging for the industry to have three different companies pursue three different theories of online [gaming]. If one company thought voice wasn't important, or another company thought that voice was paramount, while a third company thought it was all about text—that's tough for gamers. I have to decide: Am I a voice guy? Then I'll go over here, but then I can't get *GTA*. Am I a keyboard guy? If I am then I'll go over here, but I can't get *Halo*. If I'm an apathetic guy who doesn't really care about online, I'll go with that one. It's tough, and for a developer trying to make a racing game on all three platforms—it's, "OK, guess I have to make a game where you can type and talk, and I have to set up servers."

OPM Speaking of online console gaming, the 360 has been referred to as the Dreamcast 2. What are your thoughts on that? Also, will Microsoft be able to adjust quickly to complaints about its online service?
JA That's the great thing about online: You can be much more agile and responsive to gamers. If you're a designer for Nokia, how do you listen to your customer? They all have phones, but it isn't like you can just listen in on their conversations. We go online and play with our customers. We go one-on-one with our audience and find out what they want to see more of, and we have to keep listening. We can't be complacent, and you need to have the right mentality to say it's never going to be good enough.

On the Dreamcast point, there are a couple of ways to skin that cat. I remember 9/9/99. I waited in line, probably dropped $999—there were a lot of nines going around that day [*Laughs*]—and I had the best first-day console experience of my life. It had the best graphics I'd seen. It let me go online. It had the best launch lineup. The sports games took it to the next level, and I loved it. So, if you want to put us in the category of Dreamcast and say we're going to have the best first-day launch of any console in the history of mankind, I'll take that.

The second part about Dreamcast is that it didn't have content. It was a day one launch, and after that, they didn't have a steady flow of content and didn't have companies like Electronic Arts and Square Enix committed. Anyone who thinks that's a problem with the 360 just needs to go to the website and look at the release list or talk to anyone in the industry. The entire industry is behind this platform, and we've got tremendous first-party [support]. People are saying, "*Gears of War* and *Halo* aren't shipping on day one." Well, exactly, because we have an amazing first-day lineup, so *Gears of War* and the yet-to-be-named Bungie title coming out on the 360 [can] come out later. We're going to have a steady flow of amazing content, and we've got the world behind our back. Dreamcast didn't have that.

Third thing is: Why did Sega exit? They couldn't afford to stay in. Times got tough, and Sega didn't have the financial fortitude to hang in there and scrape their way back. They could've weathered the storm if they could've afforded to. We have a little more money in the bank than Sega did. We can afford a bum quarter or dry spell. We can work through it, so that comparison is tough. I think people are oversimplifying it a little bit. There's nobody who knows it better than my partner in crime, Peter Moore [former president of Sega of America], who lived through it. He's not going to make the same mistakes again, and he's ready to have the most successful launch he's ever done. I'm not worried about the Dreamcast, but I think we're going to have the same impact that the Dreamcast did on day one.

OPM What are the benefits of being first to market, much like the Dreamcast was? What are the pitfalls?
JA Good question. I'd say one of the pitfalls from a competitive point of view is that you don't know what the other guys are doing, and to be frank, the guys over at Sony have been very good at not telling anyone what they're doing. It's tough to tell where they're going with the PS3. The other tough thing is that you're under the microscope [when you're first]. [Sony] shows two movies and a product that you can't touch behind a piece of glass, and that's what you get to write about on them. For us, we just had 2,000 journalists from Europe, the U.S., and Japan all come to events we've hosted to play 20 games, [and we] just said, "Go play." My kickoff for the event in San Francisco was: You know what our strategy is and you've been to our press conferences—less rhetoric and more play. Go and enjoy the games for a day and a half. This is what our consumers are going to see. Try the wireless [controller] and walk as far away from the console as possible—tell us if you think it's good or bad. If you're a journalist, you can compare and contrast the two companies. One company has the promise while the other one has the reality. Sometimes, it's tough because we're not trying to fake reality. Promises are easier to fake. That's the hard part about being first.

The great part about being first is: We have a whole bunch of ideas, passion, talent, and titles that we want to put in the hands of gamers. We can't wait to get people's feedback. I couldn't wait to get offstage the other night and tell people to go play. I wanted to watch people experience our product and see the delight on their faces. I want to ship this sucker. We're going to get the reaction first. We're going to make a lot of people happy this holiday season. We're taking gaming to the next level, and we're the first. Strategically and competitively, your first lap is going to be done before your competitor even leaves the pits. Is it a good thing from an industry point of view? I don't know, but it certainly boded well for PS2 versus Xbox in the last generation, allowing them to sell 10 million units before we put our first on the shelf.

> "IT'S DAMAGING TO HAVE THREE DIFFERENT COMPANIES PURSUE THREE DIFFERENT THEORIES."

We absolutely haven't rushed the product out to get that benefit. It's just that we said 2005 is the right time to start [the next generation]. That's when HD gaming is going to start, and that's when all the technology is [going to be] ready. It's when the consumer and the industry are going to be ready. We weren't going to do a handheld before then, because if we did, it would distract everyone and blow '05. It's going to be a good holiday.

OPM But what about technological differences? The Xbox's late arrival gave it better hardware that made it more attractive to developers like Tecmo's Team Ninja.
JA In the last generation, we hadn't even started hardware development before they shipped, so we did have that huge advantage and we were willing to spend more money and lose more money on the hardware. They're talking about a spring 2006 release—the specs they published are equivalent to the specs we published when you go away from theoretical performance toward actual performance. It's a jump ball. Two companies selling something at Wal-Mart for the same amount of money [and] coming out four months apart from each other aren't going to [have products] materially different. Plus, they're willing to dump a whole lot of money per unit, and I'll tell you what: As a company with more cash in the bank than just about anybody, Microsoft isn't willing to do that again because it was really tough for us the last time around. So I'd be surprised if they had a strategy that said they could lose a few billion this generation to make more powerful hardware.

You have to think that Sony has learned a lesson or two about online this last generation just with their first-party [stuff]. If they had Xbox Live, *Gran Turismo* would be an online game. And you have to look at that and say it hurt, because Polyphony always wanted it to be an online game. That was part of its vision. Sony would've sold more copies, and it would've been better for the PlayStation brand. They diluted a franchise property in a world where you can play *Forza* online or *Need for Speed* online on another company's system. Here's your landmark title—the one that practically defines the PlayStation's history—and you can't make it online? That's disappointing. I'm a racing nut. I love the game and own every single one of them, so I'm hoping as a gamer and a competitor—and someone who's concerned about the health of the industry—that they get serious about online.

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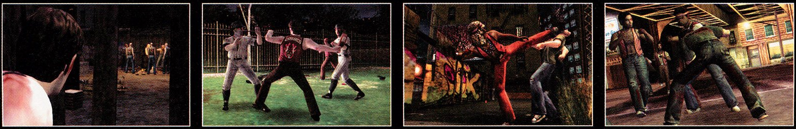

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KAZ HIRAI

ON KEEPING SONY'S LEAD INTO THE NEXT GENERATION

PHOTO: CODY PICKENS

OPM This year marks the 10th anniversary of the PlayStation. What, in your mind, has been the most significant change the PlayStation has brought to the industry?
KAZ HIRAI The biggest thing we've brought to the industry is that the PlayStation family of products has changed the way the business world and the press look at the industry as a whole. It used to be a niche industry. People would talk about it, but we'd never get a good write-up in *The New York Times* or what have you. I think the amount of business we've brought to the industry put Sony on the map alongside music and motion pictures. Nowadays, you see the cooperation between the movie industry and our industry, we're equal players. In some instances we have the upper hand, whereas if any company in the business wanted to speak to a motion picture company 10 years ago, they wouldn't have been equal partners. I think that's a fundamental change we were able to bring into the industry.

OPM It also seems like the PlayStation helped the industry grow up in general, but was it ready for that? Is it still having trouble?
KH The PlayStation business meant that you need a business plan and you have to execute on it, mainly because a lot of the companies are publicly traded. When we started out in this business, if you look at Sony's financial reporting in '95, we were bunched together in the "other" category, so it was a small blip on a lot of people's radar. Now, it's gotten to be such a big business for everyone that if you don't plan, strategize, and execute, then the margin of error or the gap you might face is tremendous to the extent that you might have a huge impact. The videogame business has a significant impact on the overall bottom line for Sony, which has an impact on share prices, so I think the business has had to mature. But at the same time, Sony wants to keep that entrepreneurial, pushing-the-envelope spirit on the creative side of things but with a strong backbone supporting the business side, so you can give your creative side freedom without worrying where the next dollar is coming from.

OPM Now that the gaming industry does make so much money, do you see other aspects of the entertainment industry as competition?
KH I've always said that the competition for our business is all other forms of entertainment, whether it's listening to music, or going to the movies, or renting the DVD. Or going shooting pool with your friends with beer in hand—that's all entertainment. There are only a certain number of hours you can devote to entertainment, and it's our collective job to make sure that people are focused on our business as opposed to watching DVDs or shooting pool. You can't deny people those things, but my hope is that they spend more time playing games.

OPM Sony's taken steps to make the PlayStation (the PS1, PS2, and PSP) an all-in-one entertainment device, but has there ever been a problem with the message of being a gaming platform getting diluted?
KH We've talked about these machines, first and foremost, as a great way to play interactive entertainment. With that, we've coupled other functionalities—functionalities that not only looked good on paper but also brought something to the consumers. Take DVD playback on the PS2—more than 90 percent of all PS2 users actually play DVDs on their PS2s as well. If you take a look at the number of motion picture titles that sell through on the UMD video side of the business, that's a feature that consumers have embraced. It's not just some feature on a sell sheet. Having said all of that, the core is all about compelling interactive entertainment. If you don't have that, then the other functionality they may have gets diluted as well.

OPM In the case of the PSP, we've seen stores that have huge UMD movie sections that dwarf the PSP games section. How do you feel about that occurrence and the PSP's performance to date?
KH First of all, the fact that there are so many UMD video titles is vindication of what I've been saying since CES of this year. It's obviously a great handheld console, but it does so much more. But we had people asking, "Are you going to get more than a few movies?" or "Is anyone other than Sony Pictures onboard?" Now, I get the reverse of those questions. Once the ball got rolling on the video side, you're going to expect more titles because they don't have to be developed like videogame titles. Look at PS2—certainly there are more DVDs than PS2 games, so I think that's just the natural progression of the video format.

To answer your second question, with the install base that we've garnered since last month—with 2.3 million PSPs, and it's been selling out since the end of March—I'm very happy with the growth of the install base we're getting, and all of this is before we've even had one holiday season. We're looking to double the install base within the October, November, December time frame in North America to 5 million or so. I'm happier that we're getting consumers and retailers, that this is more than just a great handheld console.

OPM What about the flow of software to the PSP? The summer period is universally slow for most platforms, but the PSP seemed to be suffering more than the other platforms. Will new titles for the PSP come at a steady rate?
KH We have great titles from first- and third-party developers. Take, for example, *Liberty City Stories*, and *Madden* just launched. I think between now and the end of the year, we're going to have a good lineup of fresh titles for the platform. That's been the secret to our success over the past few years with the original PlayStation and the PS2. We're out there because first and third parties bring fresh content.

OPM If you were to go back and examine the life cycle of all of the PlayStation platforms, what would you say have been the mistakes Sony has made? What should've been done differently?
KH If you're just talking about general business or strategic decisions over the past 10 years—I can't really think of anything as a fundamental mistake that we would want to go back and change. If you're looking at more technical things, like the holiday of 1999—would we have liked to sell more PS2s? Yeah, maybe. There are always things you want to do better, but at the strategic level there isn't one issue where I can say we should've done it differently. And, knock on wood, I think we were very lucky in not having mistakes of that magnitude.

OPM Being in that position, does that make Sony complacent?
KH With any successful organization or business, the longer you're on top, you have the tendency of taking that position as a given and that you're there because you've been tricked into thinking you're geniuses. [*Laughs*] That's not the case. We're here because we work hard every day and try to keep two steps ahead of the competition, and that is what has kept us at the forefront. It's also the hard work we put in and everyone else—publishers, retailers, and developers—supporting our business.

OPM With that in mind, what could make the PlayStation brand stronger?
KH It's the continuous evolution of the brand, that the name PlayStation stands for the cutting edge of interactive entertainment at any given time. Not a lot can change in a generation, but it has stood for and always will stand for that. Also, it's cutting edge, but not so cutting edge that when it looks back there aren't just three people following. It's cutting edge enough that people can walk along with you, such as the 90 million people marching with the PS2 worldwide. It's a fine balance understanding what consumers want and also being able to do that but not taking such a big step that you lose the consumer.

> "WE'RE HERE BECAUSE WE WORK HARD EVERY DAY AND TRY TO KEEP TWO STEPS AHEAD."

OPM Consumers have been pretty reflective about the PS2 now that the PS3 is on the horizon, particularly about the hard drive and online play. Is Sony as a company planning to stay the course or is it going to lead the pack with online, the hard drive, or extra features?
KH The hard drive is really a tactical method for getting entertainment content and having consumers interact with it, but more on a strategic level, online—especially in the next iteration of hardware—is going to be like air conditioning in a car. I can't imagine any car without it. We showed that online in the PS2 generation isn't going to be the end all be all, but it's become a more integral part of the experience, and I think we've proven that. If you look at the latest metrics, *SOCOM 3*, which has been out for two weeks now [as of the time of this interview]—we're looking at numbers of more than 40,000 peak simultaneous users, and you guys are playing around four hours on average [per day]. These are some staggering numbers.

As far as going forward, the biggest challenge we have is that we have a huge install base of PS2 users and a growing install base of PSP users. You have to realize that when we launch the PlayStation 3 next year—we've been in the PS2 business for a good five years—we're going to have a huge install base of users, so we don't have the luxury that other platforms have where they say, "The old platform is the old platform. This is the new platform, and we'll have online optimized for the new platform." When we launch a PS3 online service, we certainly want to take advantage of the PS3, the technology it brings, and offer a great online experience for PS3 users, but at the same time, we want to make sure we bring along the huge install base of PS2 users and the install base of PSP users and have them be able to take part in the online experience as well. What we want to accomplish is not be cutting edge for cutting edge's sake, but to come up with something that everyone who has a PlayStation console can enjoy. But we want to push the envelope for the PS3. It's a challenge, but it's a challenge that's going to pay great dividends.

OPM Is there a sense that the PS3 needs to be rushed out with the Xbox 360 being first to market? Or is Sony taking its time and making sure that everything that needs to be there on launch day will be there?
KH Yeah, you pretty much answered the question. You probably know by looking at our history that we've never been first to market with any of our products. Saturn

Wipeout
00:00
13
Cat
x30/30
x3

SECRET WEAPON

SOCOM is an immensely popular game, and it serves as evidence that the Sony model for online play can work. But one can't help but wonder if it wouldn't be even more successful with an Xbox Live–like service to back it up.

was there before the original PlayStation, and Dreamcast was out before the PS2. Plus, there have been so many handhelds before the PSP. People, especially people up north on the West Coast, seem to put a lot of credence on being out before the other consoles. If you take a look at when our competitors came out in the market, we had upward of 3 [million] to 5 million PS2 units when our competitors came out with a platform. Consumers adopted our platform because [they like our content] and not because we were first to market. And, first to market, from what we can tell, has never been an advantage.

At the end of the day, it's all about the entertainment content that you bring to the consumers, to the PlayStation family of products. We're going to make sure we're your family and that we'll take care of you. The last generation isn't just going away.

OPM So you're saying content will be king for the next generation, but it seems the PS3 has a technological advantage as well.

> "WE'VE PROVEN OVER THE PAST 10 YEARS WITH THREE PRODUCTS THAT WE CAN DELIVER."

KH The technological advantage is almost a given, but by itself, it doesn't mean very much. What kind of software do you have to help drive that technological innovation? We've proven over the past 10 years with three products that we can deliver, whether it's with first-party or third-party support.

OPM With that technological advantage, costs in game development are increasing. Will these costs scare developers away from the PS3?
KH If I look at just the closed world of PlayStation products, the answer is no. Yes, costs are going to be expensive compared to the last generation, but we bring the three-platform strategy to the table because we're giving publishers the opportunity to be in a healthy environment that allows them to invest in PS3 development.

If you expand that out to the other platforms, I don't know that it holds water. If you're doing development for the Xbox 360, how much are you going to be able to advertise that or get support from the back end with revenue that you may get from current-generation titles. That's questionable. But if you look at the PlayStation business, we're providing that one solution that allows for good revenue on the PS2 and PSP that allows people to go spend it on PS3 development.

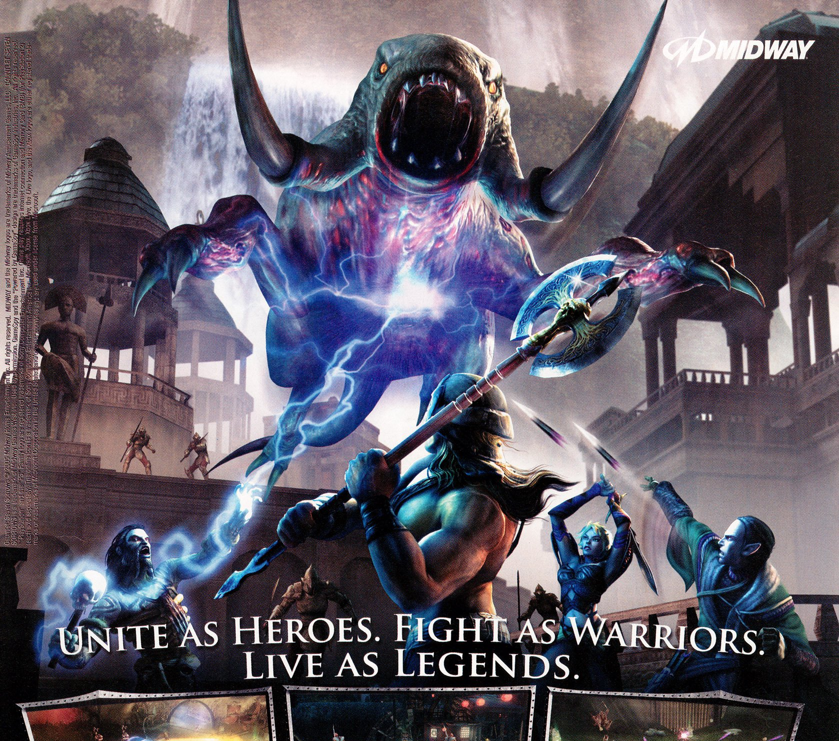
OPM By that same token, does it worry you that developers will take a lowest-common-denominator design philosophy, thereby not using all of the PS3's features?
KH If a company embarks on that strategy, most of the time they're going to find that there are companies that don't do that and optimize for every platform. That's going to be a lot more compelling for consumers, so if you're trying for the lowest common denominator, it's going to show up in your software and affect how consumers support your title, which is probably not very much.

OPM So is the PlayStation 3 going to take on the role of a PC as a full entertainment device?
KH We've always brought additional functionality to our products that people find useful. The PS3, with online and Blu-ray capabilities—these are the things that consumers are going to find [useful], as well as its game-playing capabilities.

OPM What about the PlayStation 3 controller? Is it going to stay like that?
KH That was a prototype that was shown, and it's a tall order that Kutaragi-san ran past the designers. We've gone through two consoles with essentially the same controller design, and it's time for a fresh approach. We're going to look at the form factor, but at the same time we want it to feel familiar. It's difficult to balance the two. It's a work in progress. We certainly want to make sure that when you hold it in your hands that you've come home to something familiar.

OPM What do you think it was that hooked the mainstream onto the PlayStation more so than any other platform?
KH We were able to legitimize interactive entertainment, more than any other company has been able to. It's OK if you are over college age to sit down and play interactive entertainment. It's OK to say to your girlfriend, want to play some games? Videogames that is. [*Laughs*] It's OK for adults to spend time playing games. The reason we were able to do that was because, between first and third party, we could bring content that appealed to a wider audience. Polygonal 3D allowed users to enjoy titles that weren't just side-scrolling anymore, making them a more compelling entertainment option.

OPM By that same token, it's brought a whole new set of eyes on the industry—eyes that don't necessarily understand the concept of videogames. Now we've seen more attention paid to violence and games and their negative effect on culture.
KH Every time I have the opportunity, I will go on my soapbox and talk ears off about the whole violence in videogames issue and put it into context. The mainstream media still looks at the business as something for under 12-year-olds. As we know, nothing could be further from the truth. Just like in books or motion pictures, there's right entertainment content for different demographics. We've gone out of our way in explaining the rating system. We evolved it a lot quicker than other industries. We've done a lot of different things. The ESRB and the ESA have been very proactive as well, and I think it's come a long way. |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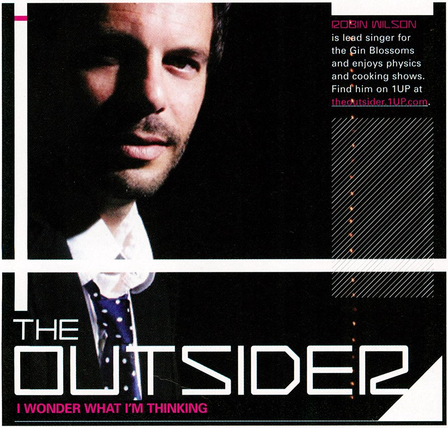


ROBIN WILSON is lead singer for the Gin Blossoms and enjoys physics and cooking shows. Find him on 1UP at theoutsider.1UP.com.

THE OUTSIDER

I WONDER WHAT I'M THINKING

When I first scored this gig writing for *OPM*, I fantasized that I might actually be able to affect the way videogames are made and sold. I assumed (and still do) that key players in the videogame industry view these pages. And my hope was that just by chance, the right person would stumble across my bit and, struck by the obvious sense of my words, wake up the next day to change the videogame industry for the better. Well, that hasn't happened and it obviously won't. But that hard truth won't stop me from repeating myself.

> "I NO LONGER DELUDE MYSELF WITH THE IDEA THAT ANYTHING CAN CHANGE."

In one of my earliest columns, I complained about shopping at Electronics Boutique and GameStop, and now that they're becoming the same thing, I'm not sure if we'll all have more or less to complain about. I'll always like these guys for used games and peripheral crap, but if they want me to continue to purchase new software at the mall, then they had better come up with a rewards program. I mean it this time: I want rewards points for every dollar I spend at GameStop and EB or I'm taking my business elsewhere. You know, Sam Goody has a rewards program. But I have tried to buy games at Sam Goody, and it never has new releases anywhere near release day. And the store's method of deciding what it'll bother to stock seems to be based on allowing your mom to avoid thinking too hard on your birthday. So, GameStop and EB, you've got a lock on the mall for now.

Unless, by chance, some executive from Sam Goody is reading this....

Another crackpot idea I have is the PS3 Arcade Edition, which essentially would be a PS3 with a hard drive full of the latest games monster-garaged into a traditional arcade cabinet. I like this crazy idea a lot. It seems doable, and there's no doubt (in my mind) a gizmo like that would fly in theater lobbies, where you could make a ruckus showing off your *Madden* skills in front of a crowd.

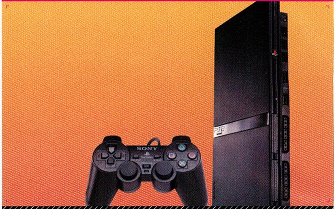
What are the odds that the right millionaire executive from Sony happens to be reading this right now? Chances are, this is the last you'll ever hear about the PS3 Arcade Edition. Say good-bye.

I once tried to use these pages to get my videogame TV show produced. I wrote about Spike TV and made it clear that I had a million-dollar idea for sale (cheap). I was even careful not to be too acerbic because I actually thought there was a good chance that Spike TV would call. I figured that I'm a big-shot writer for the *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*. I even know Zoe Flower and the guy who produces *Video Mods*. But none of that matters.

I no longer delude myself with the idea that anything can change because of what I write in this magazine. I'm just a talking head, and that's cool. Now let's go find out what Robert Ashley thinks about some crap game we'll never play. |

DATASTREAM

INDUSTRY, CULTURE, AND MORE



GAMES TO THE RESCUE

In case you haven't been following other aspects of Sony's business, things haven't been looking so great for the electronics giant. Its TV division has seen declining sales thanks to the success of competitors like Samsung, and its movie division is still being affected by the major box office slump (as is the movie industry as a whole). However, Sony's gaming division was able to pick up much of the slack created by its other divisions. Games and game-related hardware accounted for an approximate 80 percent increase in revenue over last year's numbers for the second quarter, ending September 30. Five million PS2s were sold during this period, compared to 3 million PS2s sold during the same period last year.

Certainly, Sony recognizes the importance of its gaming division and has taken steps to make it a cornerstone of its company by putting more of its financial resources behind the PlayStation 3. |

PULLING INTO THE PIT

While this should come as a surprise to absolutely no one, Sony Computer Entertainment has pushed back the release of *Gran Turismo 4 Mobile* for PSP (the screenshot above is from *GT4* for PS2) to an unspecified date in 2006. *Gran Turismo 4 Mobile* will feature many of the same elements from its console counterpart and may even include some sort of the online functionality that was sorely missing from the PlayStation 2 version of the game. In addition, Polyphony Digital has been cranking away on a PlayStation 3 *Gran Turismo* game, as evidenced by the concept videos that have been shown at E3 and other events. |

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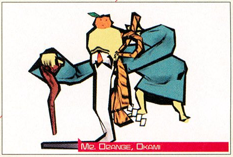
SOLID SNAKE, METAL GEAR SOLID 4

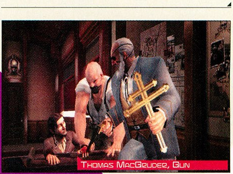


MR. ORANGE, OKAMI

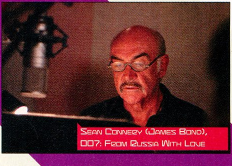
Trendspotter:

Geriatrics

We're not hating on the youthfully challenged, but a whole lot of games have started using elderly characters. Maybe it's just a sign that the video-game industry is really growing up, or perhaps *OPM* is starting to think it's old with its 100th issue and all. Maybe we all just have a soft spot for gray hair and canes, but whatever the case may be—you can't escape them! They're all over the place like a pack of rampaging...old people!



THOMAS MACGRUDER, GUN



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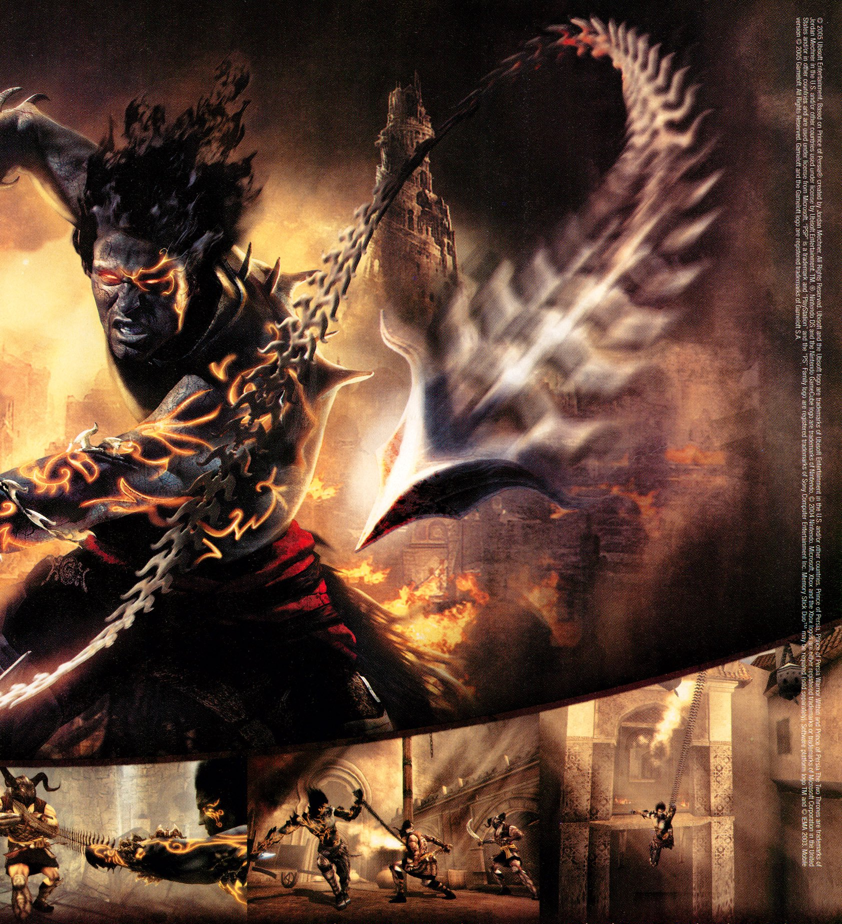

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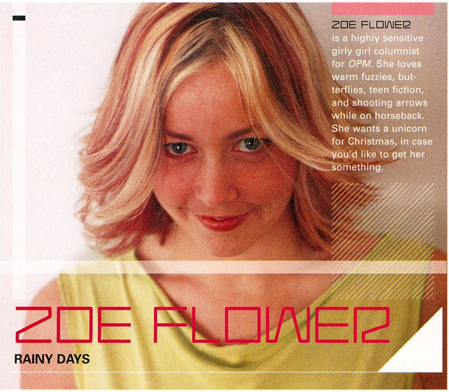


ZOE FLOWER is a highly sensitive girly girl columnist for *OPM*. She loves warm fuzzies, butterflies, teen fiction, and shooting arrows while on horseback. She wants a unicorn for Christmas, in case you'd like to get her something.

ZOE FLOWER

RAINY DAYS

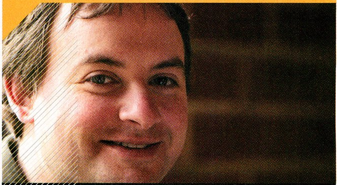
It's high noon in a bustling coffee shop that's doing double duty as a bookstore and Internet café (yay for wireless access points!). My laptop is blinking incessantly with messages from friends as my BlackBerry belts out Gwen Stefani's "Hollaback Girl" to signal an incoming call. I ignore Gwen's cheerleading solo and finish up a file transfer to my PSP, briefly considering the Zen tranquility that *Lumines* still inspires in me as my thumbs move across the PSP's slick black surface. More than ever, games are enriching my existence as they grow and disseminate from my living room into every corner of my day-to-day existence. From the towering *Liberty City Stories* ads outside my rain-drenched windows to the Atari T-shirt in my closet—and, of course, my morning coffee blogging ritual at 1UP.com—I catch myself smiling wistfully at random moments away from an actual console or controller. At this second, I am sipping an Americano with the hopes that caffeine can inspire some profound soliloquy on the great ancient beasts I have so recently done battle with thanks to director Fumito Ueda's *Shadow of the Colossus*.

I am not surprised by the quiet reflection that Ueda's latest game instills in me (once I made peace with the new control mechanisms and framerate, my female sensitivities kicked right in!). In fact, it seems fitting as I think back over the many columns I have written through the years. *Shadow*'s predecessor, *Ico*, was one of the first titles to bring to light what I had for so long believed and written about: that games can, in fact, conjure a range of emotional nuances outside the gamut of fear and aggression and can transcend the negative stigma often associated with videogames. With *Ico* and other titles, such as *Metal Gear Solid* and *Final Fantasy VII*, it didn't take long for a similar theme to develop in my own work (and no, I don't mean the regular use of parentheses to note my girlish behaviors or stalkeresque love of Hideo Kojima).

In the last five years I have argued for games as a modern art form, a learning tool, a place to escape, a platform to express political, social, and cultural beliefs, and even a landscape on which to build a deep and passionate community. I've watched the names and pictures change from month to month, whether the story is more pixels or polygons, better textures, larger, more complex environments, or massive generational leaps. But the words are still the same. I can't recall a date or generation of hardware, but I never have trouble remembering how I felt about a particular game. Today it is raining and I feel some residual sense of desolation and melancholy from my relationship with the colossi (something I will recover from once I tear into *Castlevania: Curse of Darkness*, I'm sure). I never realized what Sony's term "Emotion Engine" actually meant! But as I reflect on it now, I see that no amount of computation can replace the human element of our experiences. And it's for this reason that we'll keep turning these pages for a long time to come. |

> "I HAVE ARGUED FOR GAMES AS A MODERN ART FORM, A LEARNING TOOL, A PLACE TO ESCAPE."

WHAT'S IN YOUR PSP



David Jaffe,
Creative Director, Sony Santa Monica and God of War creator

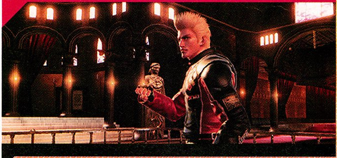
Games: *Burnout Legends*, because it's the perfect game to play in quick bursts while my wife feeds the kid at 3 a.m.

Movies: *The Grudge.*

Music: Hmm, I have be honest—I don't use my PSP for music.

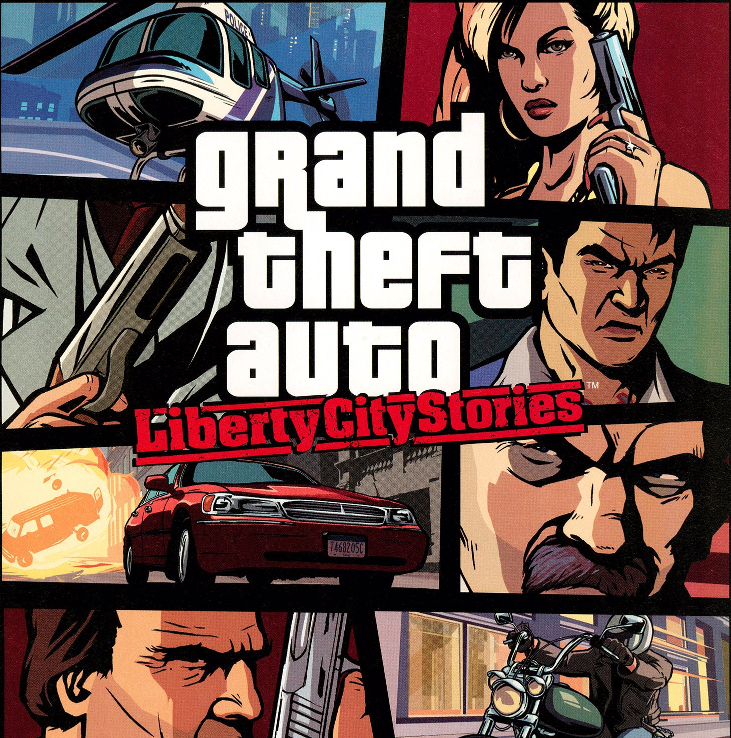
Web: I check out my blog (davidjaffe.modblog.com) from time to time, and Kevin Smith's online diary at silentbobspeaks.com.

PLAYSTATION BITS



Sega has released new screenshots of a few of its upcoming games, including ***Virtua Fighter 5***, which is currently in development for an arcade release (yes, arcades *do* still exist!). The game features several returning characters, as well as a new luchadore-style character who bears a strong resemblance to the WWE's Rey Mysterio Jr. A PlayStation 3 release is pretty likely, but Sega has yet to release any official information.... On the game-related DVD and UMD front, Square Enix's ***Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*** CG film has sold over 700,000 copies already in Japan. The figure includes sales for the DVD version as well as the UMD and special-edition versions of the film. An official North American release has yet to be determined.... Japanese PSP owners will be happy to know that Konami plans on releasing a ***Gradius*** collection for the PSP. It will include five *Gradius* games, from the original up to *Gaiden*. No word yet on a North American release.... World-famous developer Warren Spector, who is the mind behind popular PC games such as ***Deus Ex*** and ***System Shock***, went on record at the Montreal International Game Summit saying that while he thinks the ***Grand Theft Auto*** series is an example of excellent game design, its violent nature totally negates all of that. "It was a stunning accomplishment as a game design," he told the audience. "And it was wrapped in a context that completely for me undid all the good they did on the design side." |

"IT'S THE KILLER APP WE'VE ALL BEEN WAITING FOR."
- PSM



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Intense Violence

PlayStation Portable

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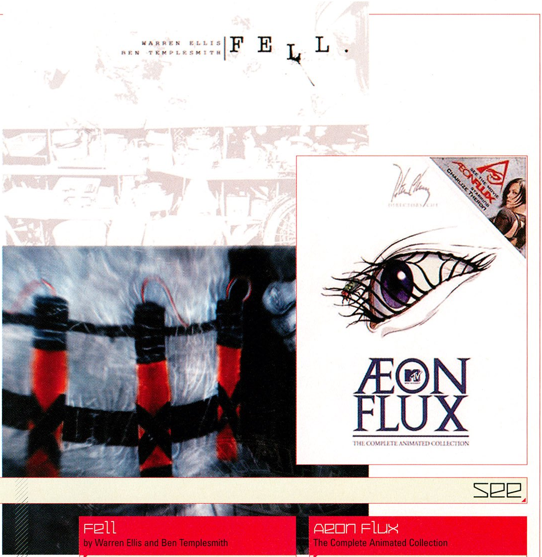
pause

when you're not playing games

Ah, it's that time of year when every single company on the face of the planet tries to get its goods out on store shelves in time for the money-grubbing-and-dispensing season. Here are a few potential purchases we think you should look out for, as well as a few other items to tear your peepers away from the onslaught of games.


WARREN ELLIS
BEN TEMPLESMITH
FELL.
SEE THE MOVIE STARRING CHARLIZE THERON
ÆON FLUX
DIRECTOR'S CUT
ÆON FLUX
THE COMPLETE ANIMATED COLLECTION

see

Fell

by Warren Ellis and Ben Templesmith

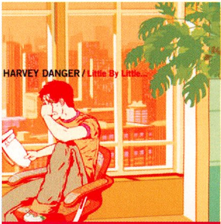
If you think comics are too expensive and you get annoyed when you buy an issue and find out it's part 14 of 22, then *Fell* was made for you. Each issue is just two bucks and is a stand-alone story that requires no knowledge of previous issues. Plus, it doesn't have capes or melodrama, just hardcore crime and the human condition.

Aeon Flux

The Complete Animated Collection

Why not find out why *Aeon Flux* was somewhat popular in the 1990s before the movie comes out and totally destroys whatever enjoyment fans got out of the series? Sure, it's a little weird, but it introduced anime-style action to lots of new people.

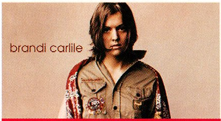
listen


HARVEY DANGER / Little By Little...

harvey danger

Little by Little

The band made famous by its radio superhit "Flagpole Sitta" released its new album...on the Web. Yes, spitting in the face of record executives everywhere, Harvey Danger has put all of its songs on its official site for you to download and enjoy, so have at it.



brandi carlile

Brandi Carlile

Think of a voice that combines elements of Elvis Presley, Patsy Cline, Elton John, and Thom Yorke—all in a roots rock setting—and you'll have an approximation of what 24-year-old Brandi Carlile sounds like. This is a debut CD that's not to be missed.

feel

GT-R Proto

Nissan

You won't be able to drive it until 2007, but we can't deny how incredibly cool Nissan's new GT-R Proto looks. It was just unveiled at the Tokyo Motor Show, and most auto enthusiasts don't expect the design to change by the time of its release.

EasyShare-One

Kodak

This is the camera of the future. Actually, it is one of the first cameras announced to have Wi-Fi features, enabling you to sync up your digital camera with any other wireless products you might own, including laptops.

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Chart Ringtones [1]

	poly
1) Sugar, We're Goin' Down	poly7880
2) Naked	poly7881
3) Grind With Me	poly7882
4) Candy Shop	poly7883
5) Wake Me Up When September Ends	poly7884
6) Tubular Bells (Exorcist Theme)	poly7885
7) Wait (Whisper Song)	poly7886
8) Listen To Your Heart	poly7887
9) Drop It Like It's Hot	poly7888
10) Back Then	poly7889

Real Tones [8]

real

1-2 Step - Ciara & Missy Elliott	real5290
Alicia Keys - Unbreakable	real5291
And I - Ciara	real5292
Back In Black - AC/DC	real5293
Cold - Crossfade	real5294
I'm Sprung - T-Pain	real5295
Like You (Ciara Verse) - Bow Wow	real5296
Presidential - Youngbloodz	real5297
Run It - Chris Brown	real5298
Stay Fly - Three 6 Mafia	real5299

More Real Tones [7]

real

Badd - Ying Yang Twins	real5320
Cute Without... - Taking Back Sunday	real5321
Ella Y Yo - Aventura Feat Don Omar	real5322
Get Low - Lil Jon	real5323
If You Were Mine - Marcos Hernandez	real5324
Lovers And Friends - Lil Jon	real5325
Naked - Marques Houston	real5326
Ohio Is for... - Hawthorne Heights	real5327
Shake - Ying Yang Twins	real5328
Wait - Ying Yang Twins	real5329

Top Sound FX [4]

real

Anybody In There	fun5630
Are U Wearing Underwear?	fun5631
Bah Humbug	fun5632
Ding-Dong	fun5633
Doctor Doctor - The Baby... Hot	fun5634
Fluffy Laughs	fun5635
Hello Santa! Mr. Claus!	fun5636
Jingle Cells Song	fun5637
Leave Me Alone Its X-Mas	fun5638
Ice Cream Truck	fun5639
Is That A Cellphone In Your Pocket	fun5640
Mamma Calling	fun5641
Merry X-Mas Everybody	fun5642
Old Telephone Ringing 05	fun5643
Pick Up The Stupid Phone	fun5644
Police Siren	fun5645
Rasta Santa	fun5646
Sleigh Bells	fun5647
Tarzan Yell	fun5648
We Wish You	fun5649

Hot Real Tones [6]

real

I'm A King - P$C	real5300
ASAP - T.I.	real5301
Back Then - Mike Jones	real5302
Bad Chick - Webbie	real5303
Bet You Can't Do It Like Me - D4L Hot	real5304
Dem Boyz - Boyz N Da Hood	real5305
Don't Trip - Trina	real5306
Down With The Sickness - Disturbed	real5307
Enter Sandman (Intro) - Metallica	real5308
Girl Tonite - Twista	real5309
Go Sit Down - Maceo	real5310
Grind With Me - Pretty Ricky	real5311
Helena - My Chemical Romance	real5312
Here We Go - Trina	real5313
Icy (Hook) - Gucci Mane	real5314
Laffy Taffy - D4L	real5315
Lighters Up - Lil' Kim	real5316
Sittin Sidewayz - Paul Wall	real5317
Wake Me Up When... - Green Day	real5318
We Be Burnin' - Sean Paul	real5319

© Erik Wernquist/Turboforce3D

Crazy Frog - Axel F

Real Tones [7]

real

Crazy Frog - Axel F	frog2803
Crazy Frog - Axel F - Speed	frog2804
Crazy Frog - Axel F - Ringeding	frog2805

Ringtones

poly

Crazy Frog [2]	frog2790
Crazy Frog - Axel F [1]	frog2791
Crazy Frog - Remix [2]	frog2792

Sound FX [4]

The Crazy Frog - Funky	frog2795
The Crazy Frog - Psycho	frog2796
The Crazy Frog - Original	frog2797

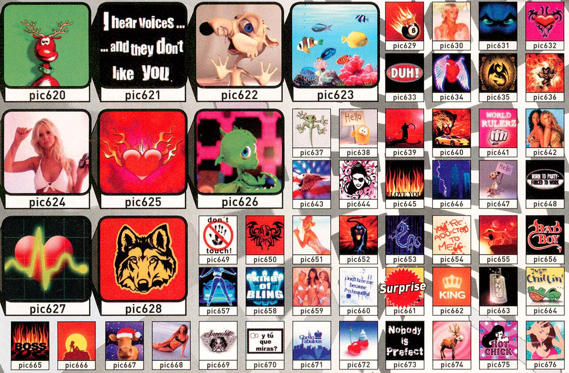
Wallpapers [3]

frog2798
frog2799
frog2800
frog2801
frog2802

Screensavers [5]

frog2793
frog2794

Color Wallpapers [3]


I hear voices... ...and they don't like you
pic620
pic621
pic622
pic623
pic629
pic630
pic631
pic632
DUH!
pic633
pic634
pic635
pic636
Hello
pic637
pic638
pic639
WORLD RULERZ
pic640
pic641
pic642
I LOVE YOU
pic643
pic644
pic645
pic646
Hello
pic647
BORN TO PARTY FORCED TO WORK
pic648
pic624
pic625
pic626
don't touch!
pic649
pic650
pic651
pic652
pic653
YOU'RE ADDICTED TO ME
pic654
pic655
BAD BOY
pic656
pic627
pic628
KING of BLING
pic657
pic658
pic659
Don't hate me because I'm beautiful
pic660
Surprise
pic661
KING
pic662
pic663
Just Chillin'
pic664
BOSS
pic665
pic666
pic667
pic668
Innocent
pic669
y tú que miras?
pic670
Ghetto Fabulous
pic671
pic672
Nobody is Prefect
pic673
pic674
HOT CHICK
pic675
pic676

How to order...

1. Messages
2. select **Create Message** in the menu
3. type in the keyword of your favorite ringtones, e.g. for Crazy Frog - Axel F — txt frog2791 to **75555***
4. confirm with **OK**

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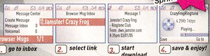
Message Center
Create Message
Message Inbox 0
Voicemail 0
Browser Msgs 1/1

Browser Msg Inbox
1) Jamster! Crazy Frog

Message 1
Jamster! Crazy Frog - Ringtone Club
From: dwn.jamster.com
8:35pm 03/01/05

CrazyFrogRingtone
4.25Kb 1kbps
Playing...

1. go to inbox
2. select link
3. start download
4. save & enjoy!

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Screensavers [5]

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GIRLS = MONEY × MONEY = (MONEY)²
GIRLS = EVIL
move2260
move2261
move2262
move2263
Study the image for 10 seconds..
and you will see a BIRD!
move2264
move2265

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3 Polyphonic Tones + 6 Mega-Wallpapers + 6 Standard Software (unavailable for T-Mobile customers) & Musicnews	8 Jamster! Tones + 8 Mega-Wallpapers + 8 Standard Software (unavailable for T-Mobile customers) & Musicnews	6 Color Wallpapers & Gossipnews	6 Sound FX & Gossipnews	6 Animated Screensavers & Gossipnews	3 Realtones + 2 Mega-Wallpapers & Musicnews	3 Realtones + 2 Mega-Wallpapers & Musicnews	2 Realtones + 2 Mega-Wallpapers & Musicnews
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J-TOWN

EVERYTHING IN ITS RIGHT PLACE

SPIN CITY

Japanese game publishers are notoriously meticulous about the control they wield over their products' image. Months-long PR blitzes are mapped out before the title is even announced. Weekly game magazines are handed prepackaged parcels of information, so one week might see three identical "scoops" in three separate magazines. Some joke that publishers' influence extends as far as the reviews themselves...untrue, of course, but there's no question that companies seek to control the flow of information as tightly as possible.

Standards like posters, print ads, and promotional videos are part of any successful campaign. But major players looking for a new way to deliver their message sometimes go as far as to create their own special event space for gamers to visit and enjoy. This past summer, Square rented out the Makuhari Messe convention center for its "Square Enix Party 2005." Microsoft built and opened an Xbox Lounge in the upscale Omotesando district to hype its console launch. And during the last week of October, Sony rented out a building in Tokyo's Akihabara electronics district for a massive public exhibition. Playable versions of unreleased PS2 and PSP software, exclusive trailers for PS3 software, and a stage show with dancing *Ape Escape* monkeys—everything a Japanese gamer could want, all direct from Sony's mouth.

Why are these sorts of events used in Japan and not elsewhere? The publishers' desire to maintain control of their message is one reason, but the intense population density is another. A large percentage of the Japanese populace lives in or near Tokyo, the focus of modern Japanese culture, and a static exhibition has the chance to reach a population several times the size of even the largest American city. In most Western countries, building your own event space is little more than a lavish exercise in self-promotion, good for a write-up in the trades and little else. But in Japan, people are actually able to visit—and to hear *exactly* what you want to say.

PARLEZ-VOUS JOUEZ?

They say that fish have no concept of water. Ubiquitous yet meaningless, it surrounds them on all sides and permeates every aspect of their lives. Similarly, the Japanese have no concept of English education. English conversation schools, or "eikaiwas," are a multimillion-dollar industry in Japan. The major eikaiwas have hundreds of branches, and countless Japanese spend thousands of dollars to study and converse for a few hours a week with a foreign English speaker.

However, eikaiwas are businesses, not schools, and are more concerned with amassing cash than educating students. Most have rapid turnover of both teachers and students. As attendance is purely voluntary, the primary goal is to keep students entertained and coming back. Any English learned is just a side effect. NOVA, the most popular eikaiwa, owes its dominance to two main factors: *always* getting locations directly across from train stations, and a neon-pink, singing crack-rabbit mascot.

4(Mon). 2005
Where can I

THE TALKMAN BIRD SAYS, "LEARNING IS COOL, KIDS!"

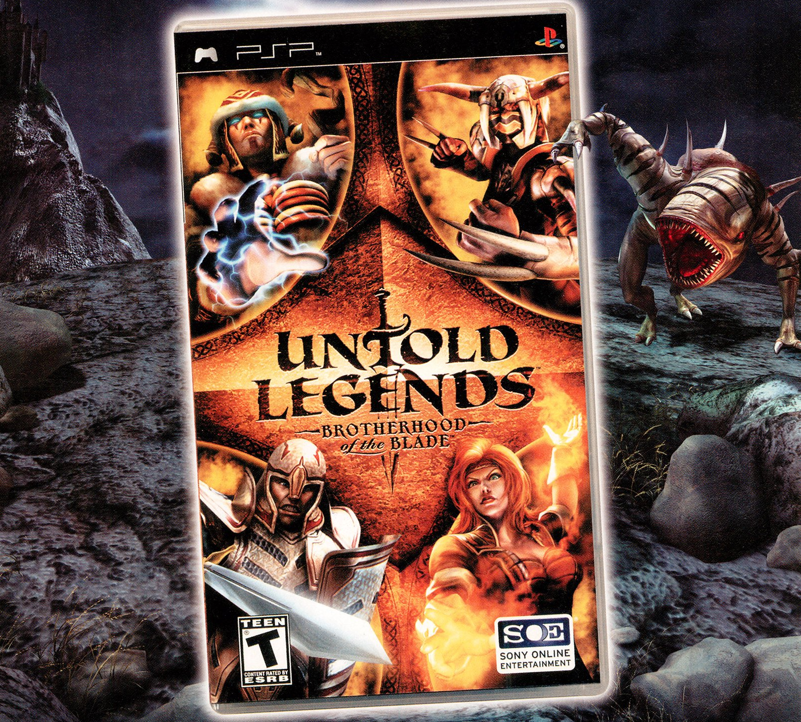
Yet still the students come. Why, if they're not learning English? NOVA's slogan is "Study abroad in front of the station," and for many students, visiting an eikaiwa is as close as they'll ever get to foreign soil. In a culture as racially homogenous as Japan's, some are willing to pay just for the "privilege" of interacting with a foreigner for a few hours. In Japan, mainstream English education isn't about communication—it's about entertainment.

> SIMILARLY, THE JAPANESE HAVE NO CONCEPT OF ENGLISH EDUCATION.

Which makes Sony's *Talkman* the perfect PSP application. *Talkman* is being marketed as a translation tool and foreign-language trainer. Players speak a Japanese phrase into an attached microphone, and a professorial bird returns the phrase in English (Korean and Chinese are also supported). Players can also practice pronunciation and drill on location-specific vocabulary, such as for an airport or restaurant. *Talkman* is more cumbersome than a phrasebook and less educational than a textbook, but it's more fun and colorful than both—and thus exactly the sort of "English education" the culture demands.

THE #1 SELLING RPG

AVAILABLE FOR THE PSP™ (PlayStation® Portable) System*



1 OUT OF EVERY 6 PSP™ (PlayStation® Portable) System OWNERS PURCHASED UNTOLD LEGENDS*

"If you're looking for another fun multiplayer game, Untold Legends is definitely for you."
Gaming-Age.com

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Fantasy Violence
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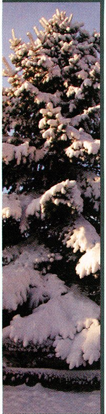
* Based on the total franchise sales on the "PSP" system through August 2005 according to the NPD Group.

DECEMBER 05

THE MONTH AHEAD FOR YOU AND YOUR PLAYSTATION

SUNDAY



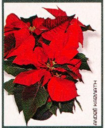
It's **Christmas** time, so celebrate! We're also using this space to acknowledge other holidays like **Hanukkah and Kwanzaa**, and the general lack of money from buying too many gifts.

25

MONDAY

05

On this day, **Walt Disney**, patron saint of parents and their mewling children who want Pocahontas Underoos, was born.



12

Today is **Poinsettia Day**. We have no idea why a squat little Christmas shrub has its own day, but it does. Time to write a letter to the Holiday Commission.

TUESDAY

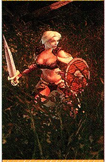
NEW GAMES

06

Snag yourself some ***Mega Man X Collection*** and ***Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones*** for PS2, and ***WWE SmackDown! vs. RAW 2006*** for PSP!

13

Buy ***Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows*** and ***America's Army*** for PS2, and ***Midway Arcade Treasures*** for PSP!



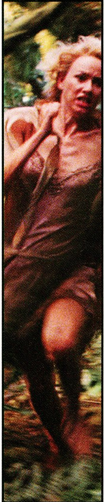
NEW GAMES

WEDNESDAY

NEW FLICKS

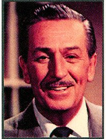
14

King Kong is pretty much the only movie to care about this month. Three hours of awesome ape action!



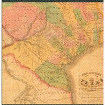
NEW FLICKS

THURSDAY



15

According to history books, **Walt Disney** died on this day in 1966. Unless you believe the theory that he's a cybernetic biped powered by lawn gnomes.



29

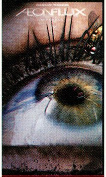
Don't mess with Texas, and in fact, celebrate today Texas style in honor of **Texas becoming state in 1845**.

FRIDAY

NEW FLICKS

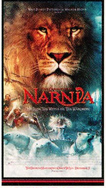
02

See pg. 41 for the DVD set, and then lament that in the ***Aeon Flux*** movie, Charlize Theron doesn't wear the same snazzy outfit.



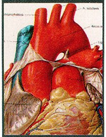
09

Remembering reading ***The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe***? You can see the movie version of Lion Jesus today.


NARNIA
THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE

NEW FLICKS

SATURDAY



03

When you find yourself at the edge of expiration and are saved only by a heart transplant, thank Christiaan Barnard, who performed the first heart transplant on this day in 1967.

17

The **Wright Brothers** took their first flight today in 1903. Travel back in time and punch them the next time you have to sit next to a snotty kid on your way to Tulsa.

REVENGE NEVER TASTED SO SWEET

MICHAEL
MADSEN

KRISTANNA
LOKEN

MICHELLE
RODRIGUEZ and BEN
KINGSLEY

BLOODRAYNE™

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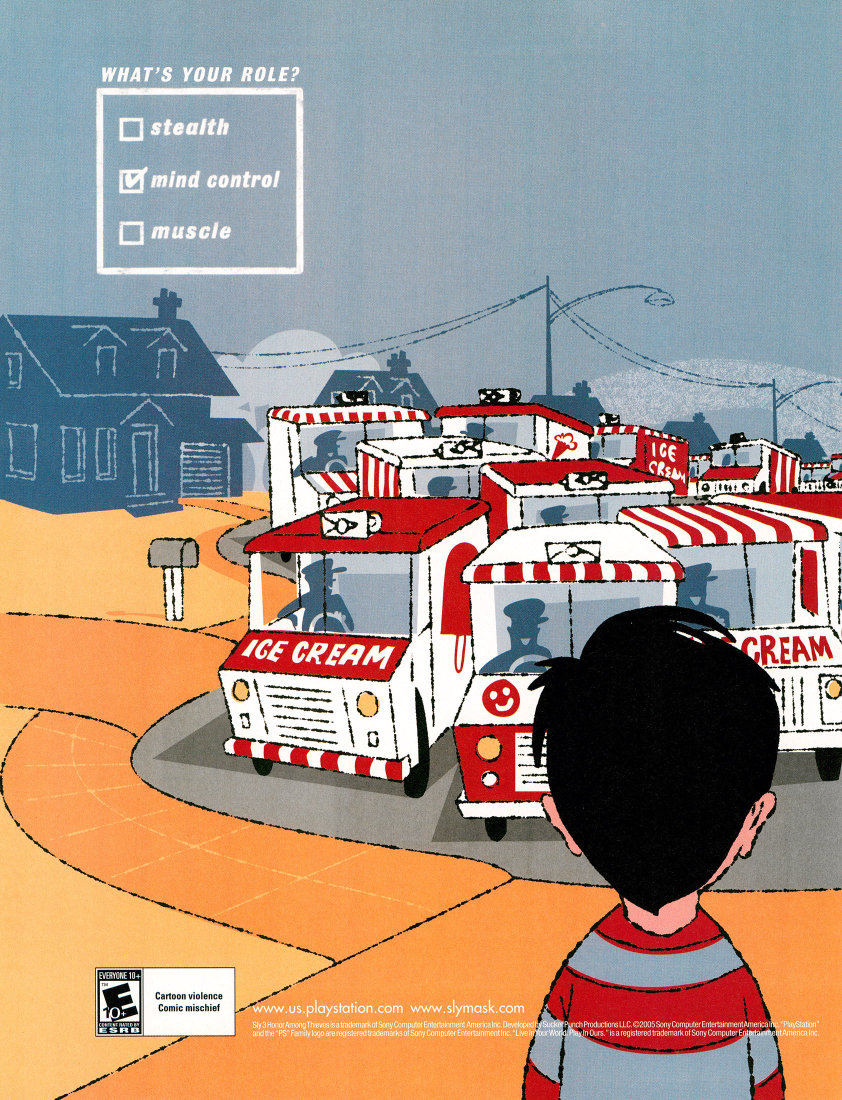
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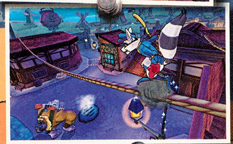

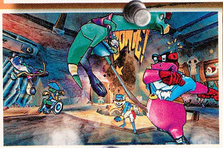

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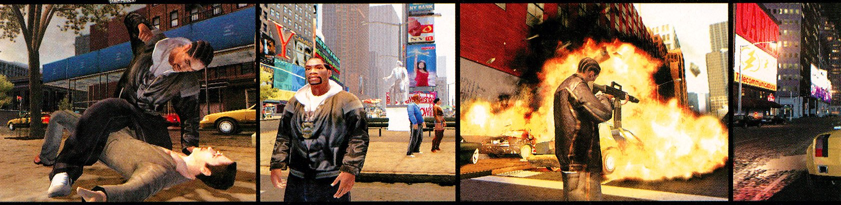

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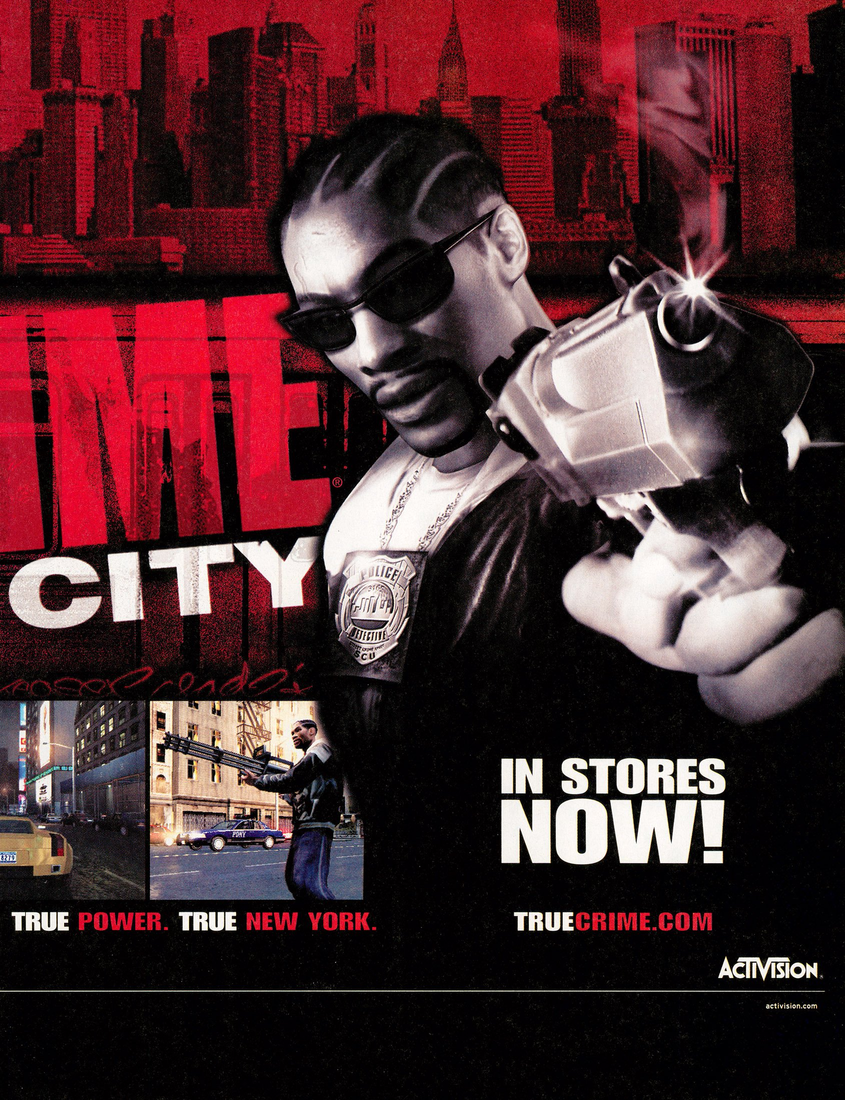
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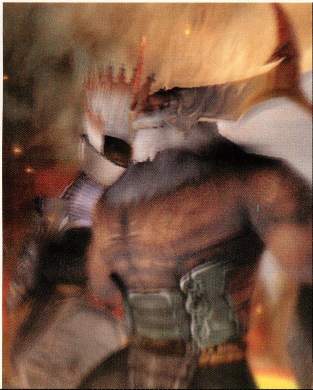
TEN BIG GAMES FOR 2006

FOR OUR 100TH ISSUE, WE'RE CELEBRATING THE 100 PLAYSTATION GAMES FROM THE PAST AND PRESENT THAT YOU NEED TO PLAY. BUT THAT LIST ISN'T STATIC—IT WILL KEEP ON GROWING. IN FACT, WE'VE PICKED OUT THE NEXT 10 PS2 GAMES THAT YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION TO IN 2006; READ ABOUT THEM HERE.



DON'T WORRY, FINAL FANTASY XII WILL STILL FEATURE LOTS OF SUMMONS.

final fantasy XII

SAME STROKES FROM DIFFERENT FOLKS

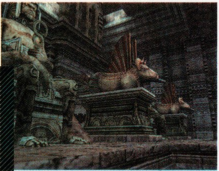
PUB. Square Enix DEV. Square Enix RELEASE 2006

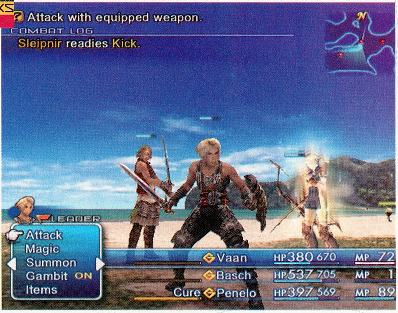
Final Fantasy XII is such a weird game that its original director, Yasumi Matsuno, is no longer involved. We'd like to think that the game broke his mind in half, but in reality, he simply left due to a longtime medical condition. Taking over his duties is Akitoshi Kawazu, producer of titles like *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles*, *Unlimited SaGa*, and the recently released *Romancing SaGa*.

This sudden switch feels a bit like the time Steven Spielberg stepped in and took over the production of the late Stanley Kubrick's *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*. As expected, while *A.I.* maintained much of Kubrick's original intent, Spielberg was still able to inject much of his personal style into the final product. We can at least say that Kawazu and Matsuno both have experience creating "different" games for Square, so no matter the outcome, *FFXII* will be the most unique *FF* of the bunch.

Combat is a mix of familiar ATB (active-time battle) from past *FF* games and real time (which itself is seemingly modeled after *FFXI*). You walk right up to baddies on the field and issue commands whenever you want. But each of your party members has a set speed that determines when they attack, designated by a line that arcs from your character to the target and changes color as time passes—when it fully changes, you attack. You issue commands and wait for them to be executed, as in a turn-based game, but it all happens in real time, with no polite "end turn" option. Other combat tweaks include a chain system, with which you build up chain counters by attacking the same sort of enemies sequentially, which results in better item drops. There's also a chance to do a damaging multihit combo attack; the attack occurs at random, but you can increase your chances of getting it by equipping certain items. Finally, enemies will actually attack each other; a quest we played had us attacking creatures that preyed on small mandragoras—so the mandragoras would actually focus on attacking the same monsters we were going after. Since the combat remains as Matsuno conceived it, Kawazu, it seems, is maintaining Matsuno's vision, and no matter what other changes he makes (or doesn't), *FFXII* will still be the weirdest and most different of the *FF* titles.

If you picked up a copy of *Dragon Quest VIII*, you probably got a demo with the same levels we're talking about (where the mandragoras help you fight the sleipnir horses).



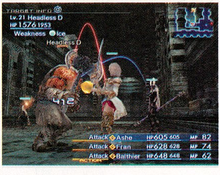


Attack with equipped weapon.

COMBAT LOG

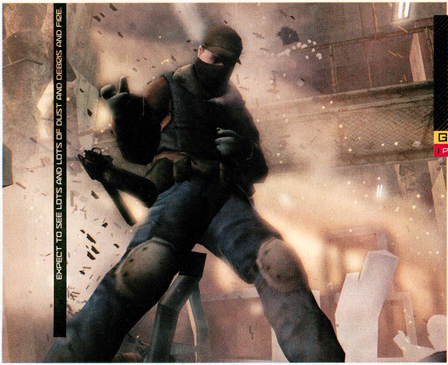
Sleipnir readies Kick.

Vaan HP380 670 MP 72
Basch HP537 705 MP 1
Cure Penelo HP397 569 MP 89



TARGET INFO
Lv.21 Headless D
HP 1576 1953
Weakness Ice

Attack Ashe HP605 605 MP 82
Attack Fran HP628 628 MP 74
Attack Balthier HP648 648 MP 62



EXPECT TO SEE LOTS AND LOTS OF DUST AND DEBRIS AND FIRE.

black

GET YOUR TICKETS TO THE GUN SHOW

PUB. EA Games DEV. Criterion RELEASE March 2006

When a development team uses favorite film sequences as inspiration for the games it makes, it is perhaps inevitable that certain levels will pay homage to some of those movies. We got to see an example of this for ourselves when Criterion gave us some hands-on time with the fifth level of *Black*, its celebration of all things barreled and triggered.

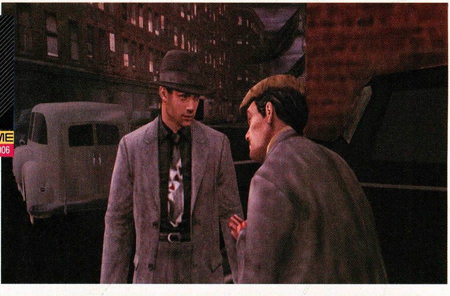
The first level in the game has you joining up with teammates on a street that looks really, really shot up, but this level puts you inside a big warehouselike room with concrete pillars scattered throughout. Your objective is to secure the area by clearing out all the enemies in the room and then head up the stairs. A lot of your foes are protecting themselves with body-length shields, so to get past their cover, you'll need to work with your surroundings. We shot entire magazines of ammo up into the light fixtures, which sent them crashing down on our enemies, killing them in a hail of twisted metal and broken glass. The whole experience is reminiscent of the lobby shoot-out scenes in *The Matrix*, with bullets flying, loud ricochets echoing, and dust rising from the debris—and creative director Alex Ward confirmed that the similarities were no coincidence.

We're willing to bet that this isn't the only cinematic reference the game contains, but until the game comes out this March and we can verify it for ourselves, we'll have to wait.

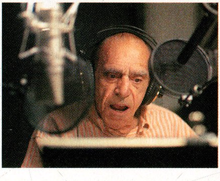
the godfather

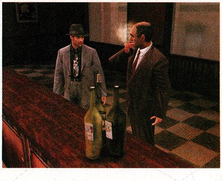
A TRUE FAMILY GAME

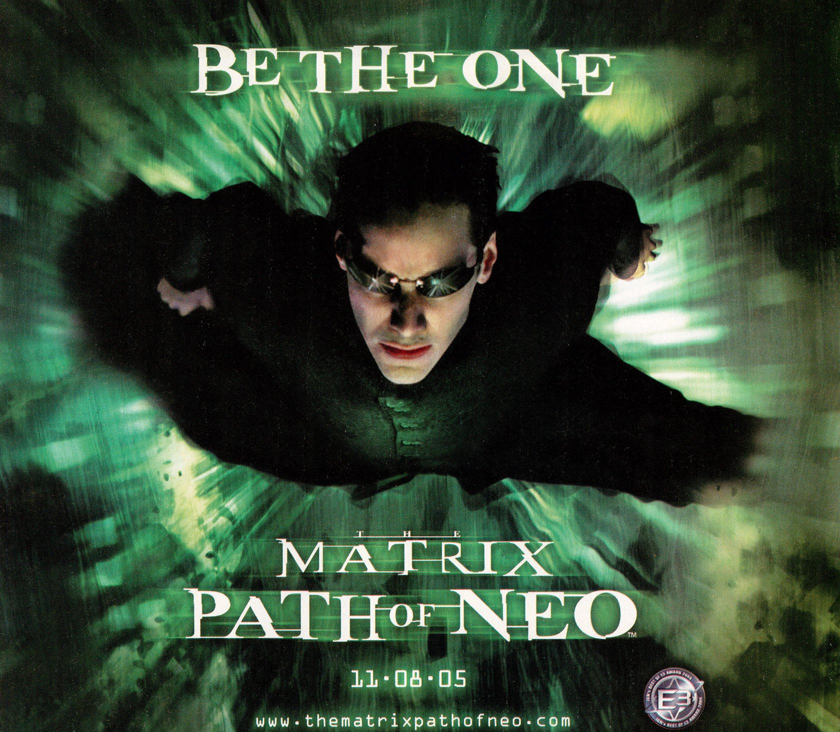
PUB. EA Games DEV. EA Redwood Shores RELEASE March 2006



Despite the continued delays of this reportedly $50 million gaming spectacle, we still haven't lost sight of *The Godfather*. After all, it's based on one of our all-time favorite films, it features massive game environments in a *GTA*-esque open-world design, and it includes a nifty make-a-mobster character creator. But what takes this over the top for us is the roster of voice talent that comprises the original actors from the film. In the credits you'll find the late, great Marlon Brando as Don Vito Corleone, James "Chaka" Caan as Sonny Corleone, and Robert Duvall as consigliere Tom Hagen. If you're looking for Al Pacino to once again take up the Michael Corleone role, well, stop looking. EA couldn't make it happen, though a Michael character does appear in the game. Undoubtedly, the biggest news regarding the talent is the recent signing of Abe Vigoda (pictured at right), who will reprise his turn as Corleone-family turncoat Sal "Sally" Tessio (the hatless man in the screen at far right). While Vigoda doesn't speak either the most famous *Godfather* line ("I'm going to make him an offer he can't refuse") or the second most famous one ("Luca Brasi sleeps with the fishes"), he does speak the third most famous line, "Tell Michael I always liked him. This was strictly business," right before his character dies. Ironically, there was a rumor circulating in the 1980s that Vigoda had died; at 84, he still considers himself very much alive and well.



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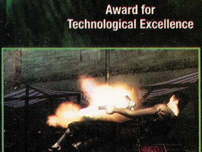

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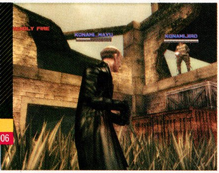
MGS3: Subsistence

A TRUE DIRECTOR'S CUT

PUB. Konami DEV. Kojima Productions RELEASE Spring 2006



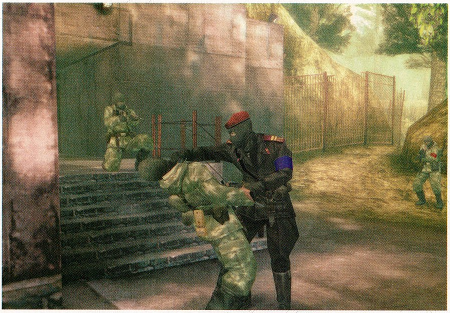
Go ahead, jump to page 131 for the lowdown on why we think *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* is one of the 100 games you need to put in your collection. We'll be right here.

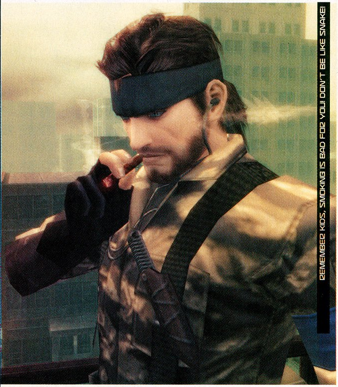
Back yet?

OK, take that game that we love so much and make it better. Add features that gamers have been asking for and content that is either completely new to the franchise or, at the very least, new to American eyes. Add a third-person camera for those who found *MGS3*'s bird's-eye camera too aggravating to adapt to. Add online multiplayer with a variety of modes. Add more minigames and modes, such as boss-battle mode or a mode of just the cut-scenes. Add two retro games, one of which was never even released in America.

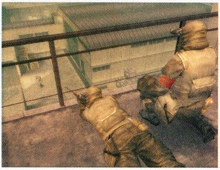
As an amusing side note, Kojima recently blogged about whether or not he should change parts of the original *Metal Gear*—namely, how in the original *MG* you always had to select the exact key card needed for a locked door (in the current *MGS* trilogy, you carry just one key card that gets upgrades in security clearance, and as long as the card has equal or higher-level clearance compared to the door, the door will open). On one hand, he liked the horror movie–esque suspense of rummaging through his equipment to find the right key, but then again, he himself kept dying, and now he's debating whether he should change that gameplay mechanic. We'll see what he finally decided when we play the game for ourselves. Additionally, he also commented on his blog, "Those who played *Snake Eater* last year should choose this answer...check it, check it, check it!" This is in reference to how *Subsistence* will ask you, when you start a new game, to choose among options like "I've never played *Metal Gear Solid*!" and the newly added "I like *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*!"

While games like *Resident Evil 4* and *Ninja Gaiden* (XB) have experienced pretty good rereleases, it sounds like Kojima is planning to show everyone how to properly enhance and rerelease an awesome game. And unless his team spectacularly screws things up, it looks like a sure bet for 2006.





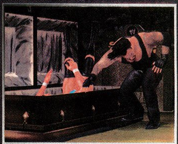
REMEMBER KIDS, SMOKING IS BAD FOR YOU! DON'T BE LIKE SNAKE!



Close-quarters combat (CQC) is difficult to pull off but is quite satisfying when done well. Not much hurts more than being punched in the neck by a Spetsnaz, as seen above.

GET READY FOR THE FIGHT OF YOUR LIFE.

SMACKDOWN VS RAW 2006



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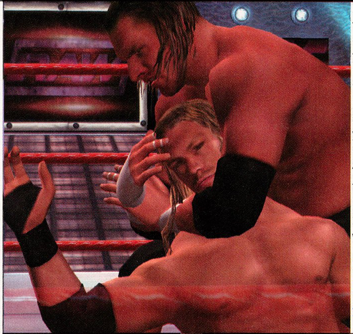
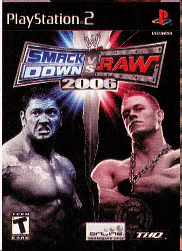
THQ has loaded WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2006 with a host of new features and modes designed to perfectly capture the look and feel of the WWE. An improved fighting system tracking a grappler's momentum and stamina makes matches more strategic and life-like than ever before. Backstage, wrestlers can take the fight to a never-before-seen bar brawl arena and even customize their own 3D locker room.

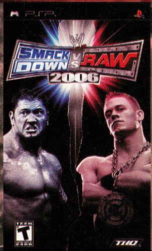


Go online with WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2006 and dropkick the competition. If you're good enough, you can even compete for an all-new virtual WWE championship. Or take your wrestler through a Season Mode so deep and involving, you'll swear you've stepped into the ring yourself. Potshot your enemies. Clobber your friends backstage. All's fair in the world of the WWE.

The squared circle awaits. Ring the bell. WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2006 arrives in November. Wrestling will never be the same again.

OH, AND IF YOU'RE A PENCIL-NECKED GEEK, STICK TO CHECKERS...





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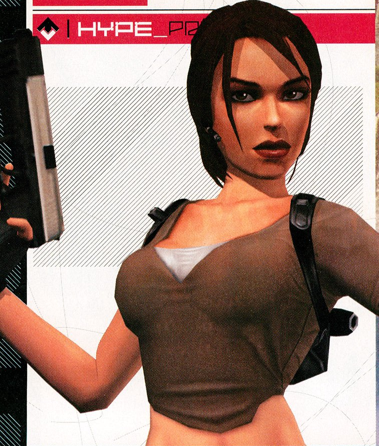


GOLLY GEE, A TOMB RAIDER GAME THAT'S ABOUT RAIDING TOMBS!

tomb raider: legend

A LEGEND RETURNS

PUB. Eidos DEV. Crystal Dynamics RELEASE Spring 2006

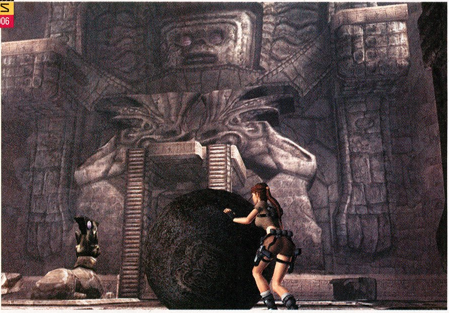
This is the most important detail about *Tomb Raider: Legend*: It's not grid based. No more stiff controls that make Lara feel more like a rickety tank than a lithe acrobat. No more grids that make you plummet to your death because you didn't land on the ledge "the right way." With Lara free of grids, Crystal Dynamics (her new handlers) has been able to rebuild *TR* from the ground up.

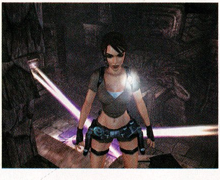
For example, take a little tweak that makes a huge difference in *TR*'s gameplay: the "saving grab." If you try to make a jump and basically do 90 percent of it correctly, but that last 10 percent makes you miss, you can hit X at the right moment to grab ahold of wherever you were going and pull yourself up. It's no substitute for skill, but it's a welcome aid in cutting down the frustration factor.

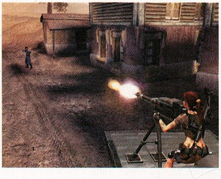
Other changes to the core game include a revised camera that does a pretty damn good job of following you. Sure, you are always allowed the option to move it yourself, but you usually don't need to (in our brief run-through, we only changed the camera out of habit). Most every surface can be grabbed, and Lara will subtly indicate (via head nods) such places. There are more tombs (75 percent of the game is in tombs or ruins). There are more physics-based puzzles.

Taking a cue from games like *Resident Evil 4* and *God of War*, there are occasional "interactive cinemas" (Crystal Dynamics' term) where a button will pop up and you have to hit it in time in order for the scene to continue. This happens about once per level and is usually reserved for events such as Lara performing a spectacular jump across a ravine. Producer Morgan Gray explained that Crystal Dynamics didn't want players to simply watch Lara perform her moves in cut-scenes; they wanted to make sure players were always involved in everything Lara does, even if it's just by doing a simple button press during a cut-scene.

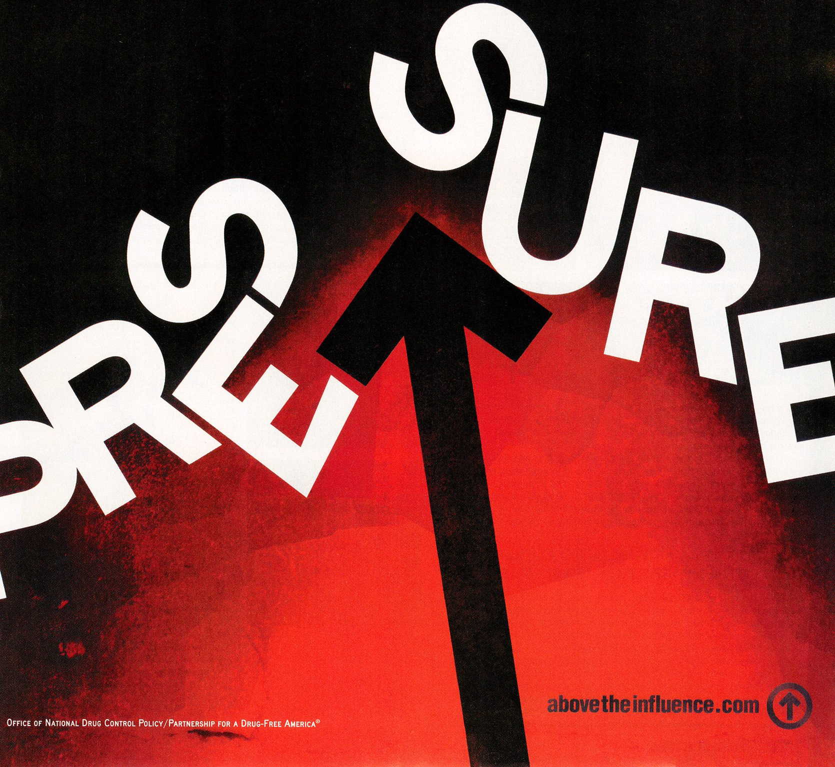
We haven't even gotten to the combat, but the fact that the noncombat portion of *TR: Legend* we played feels smoother and has better puzzles and platforming than the last three games speaks highly of what Crystal Dynamics has done to Lara, and we're looking forward to checking out more of the game later.







IF PRESSURE'S PUSHING YOU TO GET HIGH
AND GET INTO THINGS YOU'RE NOT REALLY INTO...
MAYBE IT'S TIME TO PUSH BACK.



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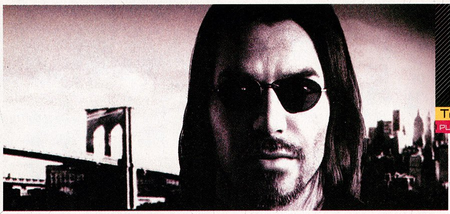


driver: parallel lines

TANNER HAS LEFT THE BUILDING

PUB. Atari DEV. Reflections RELEASE Spring 2006

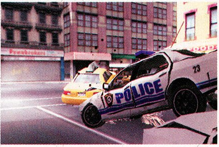
One of the first things you'll notice about this fourth installment in the *Driver* series is that Tanner is no longer at the wheel; in fact, he's not even a passenger in the car. Instead, the main character is a swaggering 18-year-old punk who is referred to as "the Kid." You start out as a low-level errand boy for a shady gang in 1978 New York, eventually working your way up to kidnapping a drug baron. This, however, is when things fall apart—the operation fails, and you get busted.

Twenty-eight years later, you're finally released from prison. You've had a lot of time to think, and you've realized that the whole job was a setup, with you taking the fall. Needless to say, you're less than happy about that, and the second half of the game becomes a *Kill Bill*–type affair as you track down and take out the people who did you wrong.

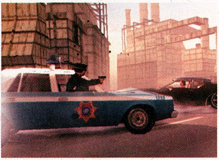
> THE SECOND HALF OF THE GAME BECOMES A KILL BILL–TYPE AFFAIR.

The game's primary focus remains driving; in fact, only 15 to 20 percent of the game will be on foot (the controls and animations for the on-foot action have been fixed from earlier *Drivers*). While a lot of driving takes place in missions, you can also visit three different racetracks in the city and compete in races to earn extra cash. Sometimes, your aim may be to win; other times, you may need to help other cars win by harming the competition.

As expected, there are garages scattered around New York for you to stash your cars in, and each one offers customization upgrades that you can buy. Happily, any cars that you had stored away before you went off to prison in 1978 will still be there when you return in 2006.



THE AWARD GOES TO
We can promise you now that regardless of the quality of the final game, *Parallel Lines* already wins an *OPM* prize for Best Mullet Physics Ever.



starcraft: ghost

WHEN ALIENS ATTACK

PUB. Blizzard DEV. Blizzard Console RELEASE 2006

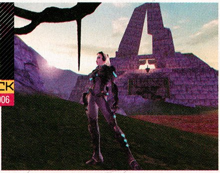
Being human is an everyday experience. Which is why we were excited to play as the zerg during some hands-on time with *StarCraft: Ghost* multiplayer. We tried out an invasion map, where each side tries to destroy the other's base.

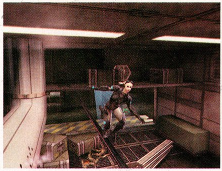
Starting out as a zergling, you don't have any ranged attacks, but you can move really fast, so it's easy to dart up to your opponents and take them out with your claws. A good team tactic is to group with other zerglings against an enemy, which should come as no surprise to fans of the original *StarCraft* (in fact, "zerg rush" has become an accepted term in Blizzard games to describe attacking en masse).

> A GOOD TEAM TACTIC IS TO GROUP WITH OTHER ZERGLINGS (ZERG RUSH!).

One of the neat aspects of *Ghost*'s multiplayer is the ability to spend points (which you earn from kills and base captures) to upgrade to a higher-level unit. Zergs "mutate" to higher-level units at any time, while terrans have to wait until they die. Zerg mutations include classic units like the hydralisk, infested marine, and mutalisk.

The terrans weren't quite as fun to play as, mostly because the starter unit, light infantry, is pretty darn weak (though if you work your way up, playing as a firebat or ghost is quite satisfying). However, we're fairly certain that Blizzard's perfectionist tendencies will result in beautiful balancing before the game's release sometime next year.





THE THIRD MUSKETEER
Though they haven't yet been shown, the protoss will be the third faction available in *Ghost's* multiplayer. Their name comes from the Greek word "protos," which means "first"; the protoss are sworn enemies of the zerg (zergling above). Their combat relies heavily on their psionic abilities and advanced technology. Our favorite unit is the dark templar, which is basically a badass alien ninja with permanent stealth abilities (unlike terran ghosts, who can run out of energy while cloaked).

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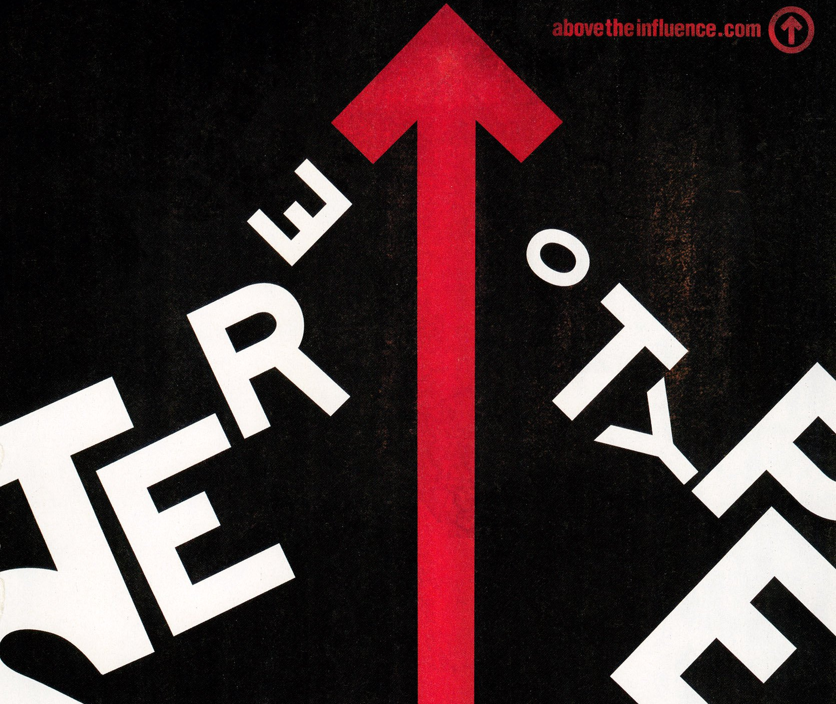

THAT WHOLE "EVERYONE'S DOING IT" THING
WHEN IT COMES TO BEING A TEENAGER
AND GETTING HIGH?
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TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Fantasy Violence

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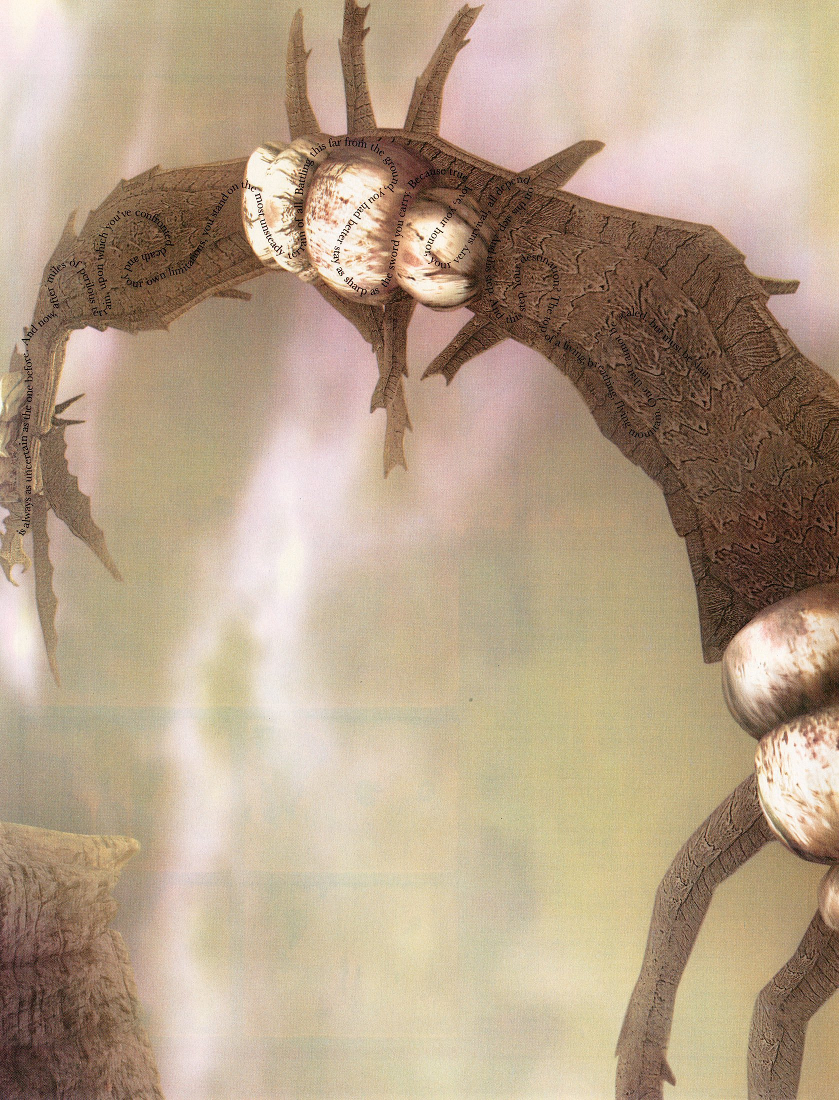
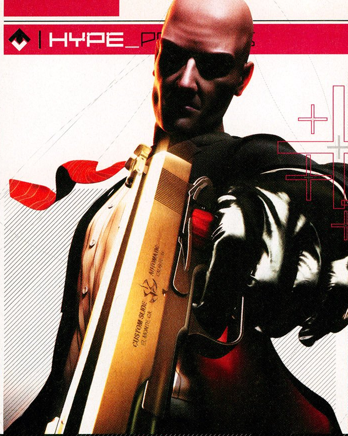


is always as uncertain as the one before. And now, after miles of perilous terrain, upon which you've confronted death and your own limitations, you stand on the most unsteady terrain of all. Battling this far from the ground, you had better stay as sharp as the sword you carry. Because true love, your honor, your very survival, all depend on this step. And this step. And this step. Your destination? The top of a living, breathing, flying mountain. One that cannot be sealed, but must be slain.



WE RELISH THE DAY WE CAN KILL SOMEONE VIA BATH TOASTER.

hitman: blood money

MAKING MONEY THE HARD WAY

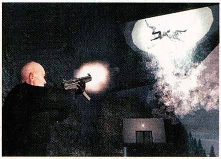
PUB. Eidos DEV. IO Interactive RELEASE Spring 2006

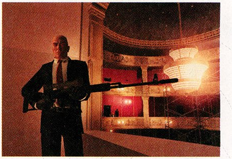
The main things you should know about the next *Hitman* title: You'll use actual in-game money (paid based on mission performance) to modify your weapons, picture-in-picture screens show events such as civilians discovering bodies, and every mission takes place in highly populated areas (such as hotels and opera houses). Yet at the heart of every *Hitman* title is Agent 47's flexibility when it comes to assassinations.

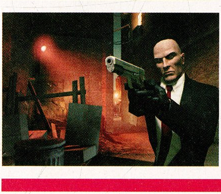
Consider the following two takes on the same mission, in which you are charged with taking out three targets in a hotel. A developer walked 47 into an elevator and then climbed up through the ceiling hatch. The first target walks into the elevator, only to be choked from above by 47. After killing the first target, 47 quickly acquires a bellhop's uniform (by stalking and then knocking out a bellhop) in order to roam the hotel unrestricted. For the second target, 47 drops an explosive near the target's room, triggering mass panic, fire alarms, and the sprinkler system. In all the confusion, 47 quickly uses a silenced pistol to shoot the target and then get away while everyone is preoccupied with surviving the nonexistent fire. Alas, the third target is well-guarded in a closed-off section of the hotel restaurant, and an attempt by 47 to just run in and shoot the target is met with death by the target's bodyguards.

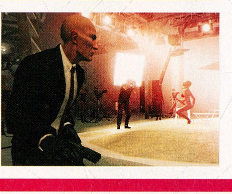
> WE PULL OUT THE SILENCED PISTOL, KILL HIM, AND JUST WALK AWAY.

We did the mission this way: For target one, we waited for him to reach his room. Once he got inside, we situated ourselves on a quiet balcony on the other side of the hotel and used a sniper rifle (hidden within a suitcase) for a head shot. For the second target, we waited until he was near his room and there were no guards around. A quick double-tap to his head with a silenced pistol did the job, and we then hid his body inside his room and put up a "Do not disturb" sign. Finally, since target two was about to meet with target three, we assumed target two's identity and concealed our silenced pistol inside a briefcase that was supposed to contain money. We walked in, got frisked by the guards (who did not check the briefcase), and proceeded to the meeting. Target three excused his guards to count the money, and that's when we pulled out the silenced pistol, killed him, and then just walk away.









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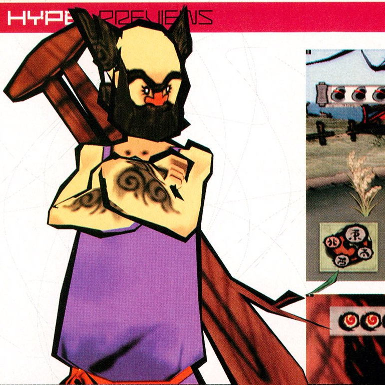


okami

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A DOG...ER, GOD

PUB. Capcom DEV. Clover Studio RELEASE 2006

Beneath *Okami's* beautiful hand-drawn surface lies a world of work—a world where the mythical sun goddess Amaterasu takes the form of a wolf to help townspeople, slay enemies, and generally make the world a better place for everyone. But in order to do that, you have to master Amaterasu's ability to use calligraphy to affect her environment. You can do plenty of stuff with a brush and ink—some actions are just for fun, but others help you solve puzzles.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

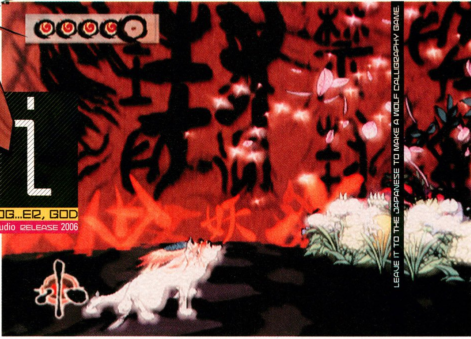
Fighting enemies in *Okami* is pretty straightforward, but it can be a little tricky at first when you're still just learning how to use calligraphy. But once you get a handle on the technique, you can make quick work of someone and also pull off some special tricks. You can pour ink on an enemy's face to blind him and then use swiping motions to cut him in half. However, there's a catch: Amaterasu has to wear an enemy down with a flurry of paw combinations before you can slice and dice.

MASTER YOUR ENVIRONMENT

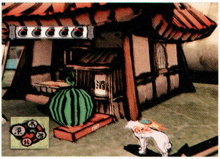
One of the major aspects of *Okami* is learning how to use calligraphy to solve puzzles. Some puzzles require you to interact with the environment, which may or may not include the slicing of trees or a delicious watermelon. In either case, slicing is really easy to do since it involves only jumping into the calligraphy mode and making a horizontal slash with the brush. If you've done it correctly, the object in question will split before your very wolf eyes.

AID YOUR FRIENDS

This swordsman above is one of the first townspeople you encounter in *Okami*. Unfortunately, while he's quite knowledgeable about the ways of combat, he's not so adept in their execution. One of the first lessons he teaches you is how to do multiple slashes, but you may have to boost his ego a little bit by making slashes right after he does in order to convince him of his own power.

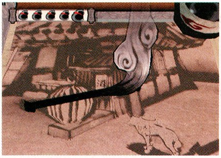


LEAVE IT TO THE JAPANESE TO MAKE A WOLF CALLIGRAPHY GAME.



行商人「東」

だったら スサノオ とかいう男を
連れてきて おくれよ



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この香りは… クシナダちゃん 手作りの
銘酒 絶景神？

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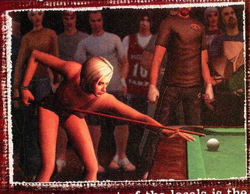
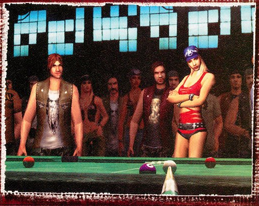
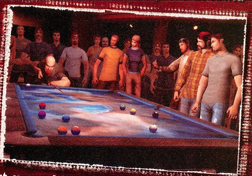


Winning respect of the locals is the key. Beat them at their own game and pile up the cash!



Hotties, hustlers and bar-room brawls make this "the baddest game in town!"



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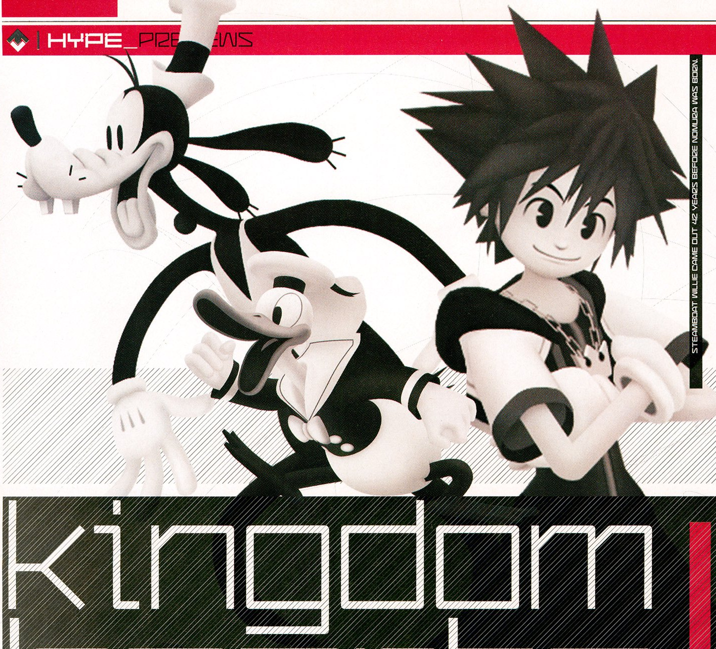


STEAMBOAT WILLIE CAME OUT 42 YEARS BEFORE NOMURA WAS BORN.

kingdom hearts II

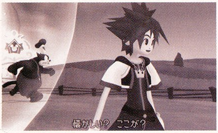
THE KEY TO SQUARE AND DISNEY'S KINGDOM

PUB. Square Enix DEV. Square Enix RELEASE Spring 2006

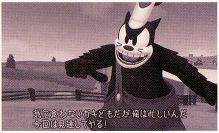
Rumors can finally be confirmed, as Sora and gang do indeed venture onto the Timeless River, which is the *Steamboat Willie* world. *Steamboat Willie*'s significance is that it marks the first appearance of both Mickey Mouse and his nemesis, Pete (animation diehards will argue that *Steamboat Willie* is Mickey's third film, after *Plane Crazy* and *The Gallopin' Gaucho*, but most people consider *Willie* to be the first Mickey cartoon). Both King Mickey and Pete are redesigned to fit into the *Steamboat Willie* world, and so are Sora and his friends (Sora becomes simplified while Donald Duck and Goofy look like old-school versions of themselves). This transformation of Sora's party also occurs when they explore other worlds, like Atlantica from *The Little Mermaid* or Pride Rock from *The Lion King*. While Atlantica will trigger the same transformations as the ones that happened when Sora and the gang visited Ariel's grotto in the original *KH*, Pride Rock will feature transformations like Sora becoming a lion cub, Goofy becoming a tortoise, and Donald becoming a bird (a regular flying one, not like his usual bipedal walking self). Also, even though Sora has visited the world of *The Little Mermaid* before, Atlantica is not a rehash of the grotto found in *KH*; this is an example of how *KH2* has significant differences when

> SORA AND GANG DO INDEED VENTURE INTO THE STEAMBOAT WILLIE WORLD.

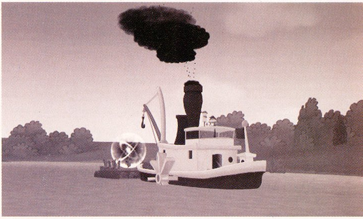
No, this isn't a coloring mistake—Squenix is being faithful to *Steamboat Willie*'s look, so the whole world is in black and white as a result.

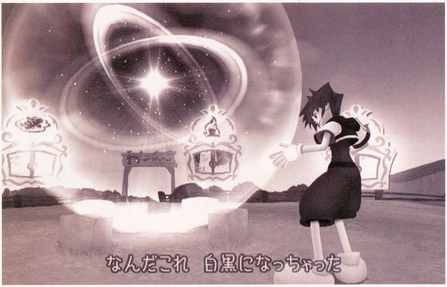


懐かしい？ ここが？

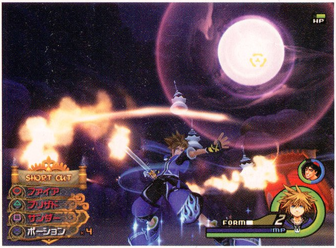


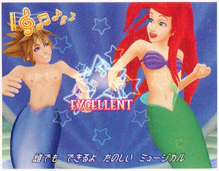
気に食わないガキどもだが俺は忙しいんだ
今回は見逃してやる！



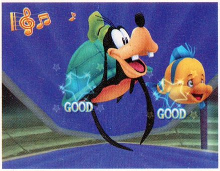


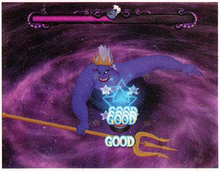
なんだこれ 白黒になっちゃった





誰でも できるよ たのしい ミュージカル





Sora goes to previously seen movies like *Aladdin*, *Hercules*, *The Little Mermaid*, and even *The Nightmare Before Christmas*.

Not much else was shown of the game, though the latest Japanese trailer has some strong hints about the story line. One thing it seems to imply is that Sora is caught in the middle of a war between the Heartless and the Nobodies. Fans like to propagate the theory that Ansem (the leader of the Heartless) is linked to DiZ (a bad dude who is apparently part of the Organization, which was introduced in *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories* for the GBA). The theory goes that when Ansem became the king of the Heartless, he left his soul and body behind, and that soul/body combo became DiZ. On top of that, DiZ seems to be working with King Mickey, Rikku, Namine (the witch who erased Sora's memories in *COM* and is subsequently rescued from the Organization by Sora), and the mysterious blond-haired kid (Nomura still hasn't given a name for him). With the help of those folks, plus DiZ's own manipulation of the Organization from within, it appears that he's trying to put the Organization into a position where it can be crushed by him and his jolly crew (while this is strongly implied in the trailer, no apparent motive has been given yet). And we still don't know where Sora fits into this. Yet after seeing the gorgeous art and the improved combat and camera, we can't wait to finally see what the heck Sora is up to.

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REVIEWS

MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE, ONE GAME AT A TIME

88

KING KONG

OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE

GAME OF THE MONTH

CONQUERING THE MOVIE GAME

RATING KEY

No more blargs, octagons, or whatever you've called them—now we're sticking with straight-up numbers. And any game that receives five of 'em is something truly special that deserves a spot in your collection. On the other hand, a 2.5 is merely mediocre. And a 0.5? Well…at least they're fun to rip apart.

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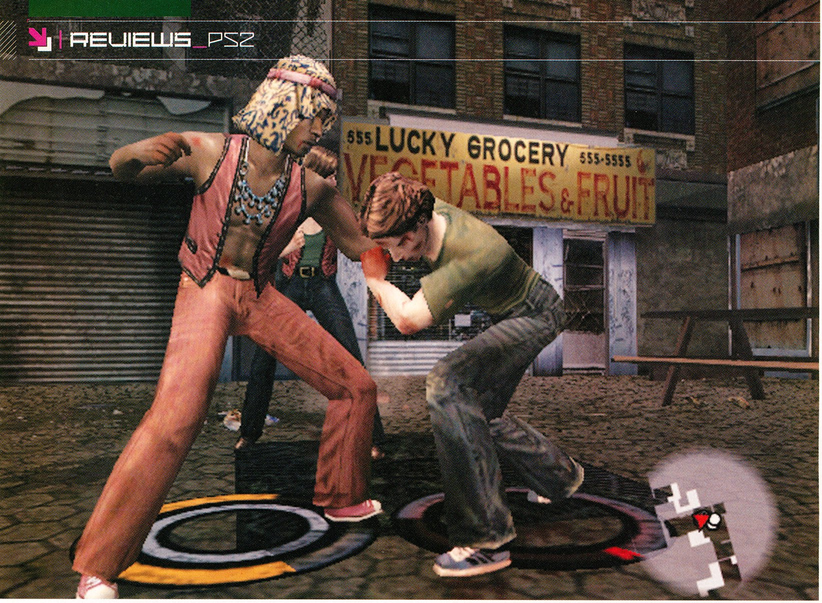


PUB. Rockstar DEV. Rockstar Toronto ESRB M MSRP $49.99

THE WARRIORS

ALL THE WAY BACK TO CONEY

As you walk into the Warriors' Coney Island home base, activity abounds. In the mezzanine, some of the up-and-coming gang's soldiers nurse a few 40s while another group lounges around a table and talks shop: recent fights, strategies, girls. Downstairs, the pull-up bar and punching bag are being put to good use. Over the radio, a sultry-voiced DJ gives an update on the latest gangbanging activities around the city.

This seemingly alive converted warehouse is a mere sample of the rich world this game creates, but more on that later. *The Warriors* is Rockstar's stab at the brawler genre, and it just so happens to be a licensed property as well—two game types that don't always turn out so hot. The 1979 movie of the same name is prime source material, though. In it, members of the Warriors, a New York City gang on the rise, are falsely accused of assassinating apparent gang-uniting chosen one Cyrus and spend the rest of the night trying to dodge would-be vigilantes and get home. Granted, it's not the most complex story, but it offers all the depth one could hope for from a brawler, and the colorful gangs—be it the face-painted, baseball-bat-wielding Furies or the all-girls Lizzies—are perfect fodder for your fists. Rockstar did more than just nail the vibe of the cult-classic action flick, though; it also took a necessary, though dangerous, step by adding a backstory to the proceedings, which composes a majority of the game. What could have turned out embarrassing or even offensive to fans actually proves to be quite engaging.

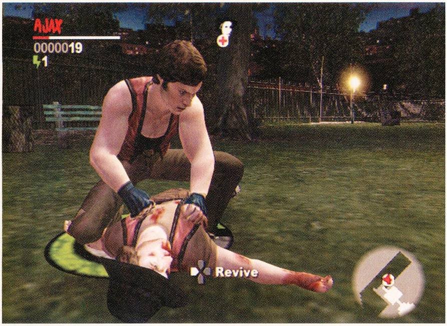
But while a slick presentation—including excellent voice acting and cut-scenes and a great soundtrack—is always welcome, it's the punching and the kicking and the beat-em-upping that need to be good...and they are. The basic move set includes light and heavy attacks, combos, and grabs, which, on their own, aren't anything special, smooth as they are. Fortunately, *The Warriors* goes well beyond the typical *Final Fight*/*Double Dragon* mold. No matter the mission, you always have at least one Warrior with you, often more (which is key in terms of co-op play—see sidebar). This not only means bigger battles but also gives you some basic yet effective squad-command options that really enhance the feeling that you're part of a gang.

IT OFFERS ALL THE DEPTH ONE COULD HOPE FOR FROM A BRAWLER.

And whether you're on a mission or just exploring Coney Island's not-so-friendly confines (complete with optional reward missions), you'll find plenty to do outside of the primary goals. Peep a stereo in a car? Bust the window and pry it loose with a few spins of the left analog stick. Jewelry store put a twinkle in your eye? Pick the lock with a button-stopping minigame for some complimentary bling. You can also mug pedestrians, dart in the shadows to lose the fuzz, and tag over

COLORS

According to the Internet Movie Database, "several violent incidents" occurred at early showings of *The Warriors*, prompting promoters to cut photos of gang members from the film's posters.



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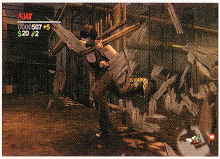
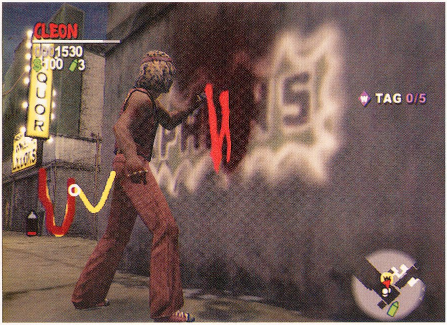
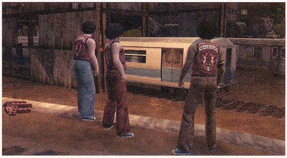
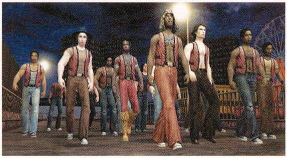








rival gangs' marks. The money you earn pulling off these stunts can be used to buy various street goods, including spray paint, weapons, and flash, the game's narcotic version of the ubiquitous health pack. All these optional minigame-based events help flesh out the seedy, late-'70s New York City game world, making it fun to explore each level while acting out all your hooligan-related tendencies. (It should be noted that some of these criminal actions can be uncomfortable: Mugging a young woman or assaulting a practically defenseless lone security guard may rub some gamers the wrong way.) Back at the Warriors' home base, you can take on one of the five unlockable flashback missions, which are self-contained, full-fledged tasks that tell the tales of how the various soldiers joined the team. There's also a rumble mode, which has myriad brawling matches, a handful of which you'll gladly play repeatedly.

Eventually, though, you'll want to hit up the story, and again, *The Warriors* handles things well by injecting plenty of variety into the missions in order to avoid the pitfall of many brawlers: repetitive gameplay. Tagging (which you accomplish by tracing a line with the left analog stick) is a common goal, as are the occasionally frustrating stealth bits and running, which is a big part of the movie and turns out surprisingly varied here.

It's a shame that with all that's handled so well, some minor technical issues hold things back. Slowdown will pop up on occasion, particularly in big battles. The bigger brawls are also when the targeting system and the camera are understandably at their worst, and you'll often get hit from behind or start whaling on the wrong opponent. Also, the game's tossing system—visualized in the form of an arc you can manipulate—is clunky and slow to respond, which is a killer in a particularly key scene.

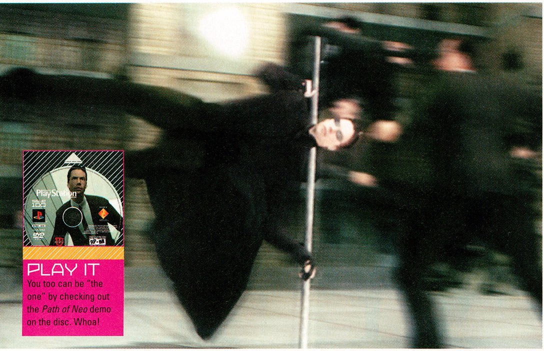
But so much is done so well here. Rockstar obviously went to great lengths to nail the movie's feel, and it pays off. When you hit the actual movie-based scenes near the game's end, you really feel a part of the world—a world that is far deeper and more organic than any other brawler's in years. In all, *The Warriors* pulls off an impressive double feature, doing both its license and genre proud. | *Greg Ford*

VERDICT Perhaps the best licensed game on PS2, and one of best brawlers in years.

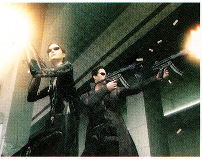
SCORE **4.5**|5

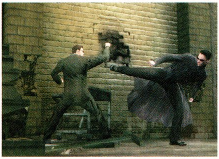
COME OUT, PLAY

One of *The Warriors'* biggest achievements: making co-op gameplay fun again. A second player can jump into the game at any time, and if he decides he'd like to explore the level on his own, the screen will split. Minus some slowdown and a disorienting splitscreen-to-merged-camera cut (which you can turn off), this is definitely worth recruiting a pal to try out.



PLAY IT
You too can be "the one" by checking out the *Path of Neo* demo on the disc. Whoa!





We're not about to tell you how exactly the ending of *Path of Neo* plays out, but it fits in perfectly with the whole "what is reality?" theme of the original movie.

PUB. Atari DEV. Shiny ESRB T MSRP $49.99

THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO

BEST MOVIE-TO-VIDEOGAME ENDING EVER

Imagine playing a game based on the Superman universe, but instead of controlling the Man of Steel, you control Aquaman. That's probably the most apt analogy you can draw with the *Enter the Matrix* game in relation to the *Matrix* movies. Everyone wanted to play as Neo and use his amazing powers, but instead, we were stuck with two secondary characters who just didn't have quite the same superhero aura about them. So, essentially, *Path of Neo* is the game that *Enter the Matrix* should've been—and in more ways than one.

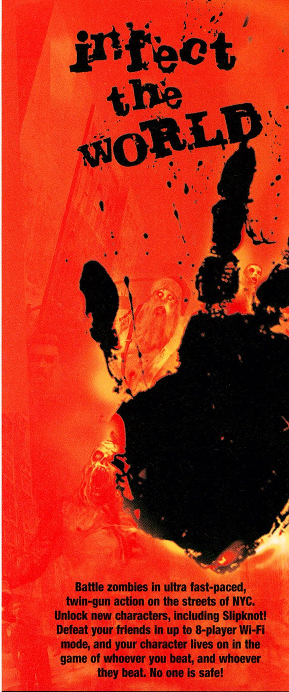
The game not only gives you the opportunity to finally play as Neo, but also presents a far more interesting, and slightly more entertaining, perspective on the *Matrix* universe. Intriguingly, these moments come in the form of levels and scenarios that weren't in the film, including multiple intense fights with Agent Smith and his buddies, as well as a variety of rescue missions that add much more depth to the *Matrix* trilogy story line. But the best part about *Path of Neo* is its ending, because it fits the game incredibly well and serves as a model for future movie-based videogames.

However, there are still some pretty substantial problems with the gameplay: The lock-on system is absolutely terrible, especially when you're trying to target different enemies during a gunfight. It never seems to target the right enemy, and it often takes too long to circle around and get an enemy in your sights before you're able to use the lock-on. The hand-to-hand combo mechanics are actually quite fun, but you may quickly grow tired of seeing the same slow-mo moves over and over again. Plus, there's a slight problem with animations taking over Neo's movements, making it feel as though you don't have much control. There are also some technical shortcomings, including an unsteady framerate and some rather obvious clipping issues.

Despite all this, *Matrix* fans will be hooked. For everybody else, it's worth a peek, but this path isn't meant for you. | *Giancarlo Varanini*

PROS Great additions to the *Matrix* story, best ending for a movie-based game
CONS Severe technical issues with the camera and lock-on system

SCORE 3 | 5



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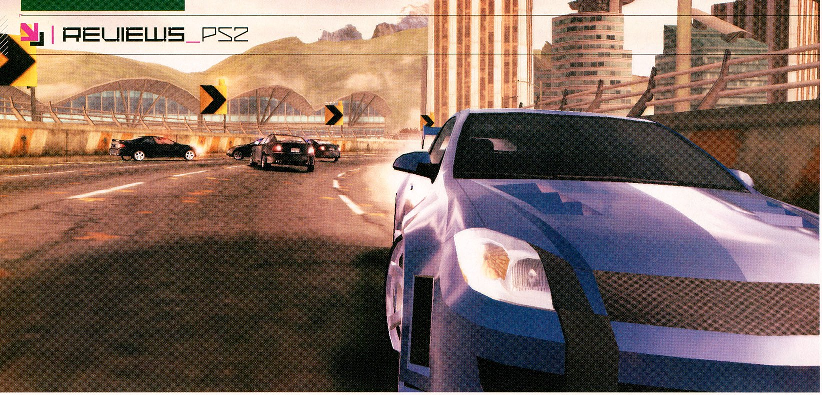


| PUB. Electronic Arts DEV. EA Canada ESRB T MSRP $49.99

NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED

AKA UNDERGROUND 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT

I have to admit I was a bit perplexed when I heard that *Most Wanted* was supposed to be some sort of mixture of the current *Underground* series and *Hot Pursuit 2*—one of the greatest racers ever made.

Now I know that what EA meant was that *Most Wanted* is basically *Need for Speed Underground 2* with police chases and that it takes place entirely in the daytime. At first, that was quite disappointing. Don't get me wrong—*Underground 2* is a lot of fun and all. It's just that I was expecting more than a slight homage to the classic style of *Need for Speed*. Instead, all I really got was a handful of exotic cars to play with: a few Porsches, the Lamborghini Murcielago, and so forth.

But as I continued to play, I found myself getting sucked into the experience all over again. Yes, pimping out Civics and Mustangs is pretty old hat by now in the videogame world, but it's still engaging on a certain level. And with *Most Wanted*, the new story line helps keep the game and the car collecting on track by pitting you against the "black list," the 15 best street racers in the world. By making you earn the right to race each of these speed demons for pinks, *Most Wanted* gains a level of focus that the previous two titles completely lack.

This doesn't mean you can't roam the city, though. The open-endedness from *Underground 2* is back, though it's much more streamlined this time around. And if wandering aimlessly isn't your thing, *Most Wanted* allows you to hop to each required challenge or back to your safe house at will—no more searching for the proper back street or wasting precious moments while traveling across town.

So, *Most Wanted* is basically a more refined *Underground 2*, right? Well, mostly. One place the series took a real step back is in its presentation. More specifically: The racing takes place during the day now. And that's an issue because, let's face it, urban sprawl is a lot less interesting in the daytime. That and the fact that the streaking lights and dark colors are no longer around to hide the game's inconsistent framerate. And, of course, we still don't have a replay mode for some reason. *Most Wanted* is all about customizing your ride, yet you never actually get a good look at it, save when it's sitting idle in your garage.

MOST WANTED IS BASICALLY UNDERGROUND 2 WITH POLICE CHASES.

My biggest disappointment by far, though, is the total lack of online play on the PS2. For some reason, on consoles only the Xbox and Xbox 360 versions of *Most Wanted* feature an online mode. That's just lame. | *Greg Sewart*

HISTORY LESSON
The *Need for Speed* series is over 11 years old now, having been first released as a driving simulator for the ill-fated 3DO.

VERDICT It's not as pretty as last year's game, but this refined *Underground* still delivers the goods: fun, fast racing.

SCORE 4|5

type07×32 ×04

PUB. Tecmo DEV. Tecmo ESRB E MSRP $49.99

FATAL FRAME III: THE TORMENTED

QUITE SIMPLY, THE SCARIEST GAME EVER

I used to pimp the hell out of the original *Fatal Frame*, telling anyone willing to listen that it's the scariest game ever made. Well, those days are gone, because we have a new champion in the goose-bumps battle royal.

Tormented borrows liberally from *Silent Hill*'s bag of freak-out tricks to play your nerves like some sort of ectoplasmic mandolin; the game also draws more heavily from film tradition, with cinematic cameras, a sensibly ordered story line, and even cat-in-the-cupboard-type horror-flick standbys.

But the improvements to the game lie in its fundamental structure. You now switch between the horrors of the dreamland Manor of Sleep and the waking world, the latter of which serves as a safe haven between bouts of nighttime terror (…*or DOES it*?) and a nice counterpoint to the tension of the night.

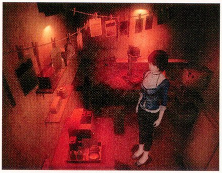
The other big change is the inclusion of two playable characters in addition to lead character Rei: Miku (who's more nimble but less powerful) and Kei (who's the strongest physically but must hide from ghosts rather than fight them). Kei's segments in particular work amazingly well because they effectively strip you of your only comfort in the Manor of Sleep—the ghost-busting camera—so just when you think things couldn't possibly get any scarier…oh yeah, they *do*.

Unfortunately, in order to get much of what's so brilliant about *Tormented*, you really need to be familiar with the whole series, because this one mines the previous games for remembered dread, referencing people, events, and settings from both earlier titles.

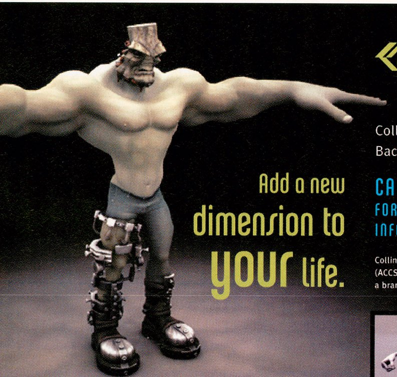
It's also unfortunate that this is still very much a linear affair; you don't get to pick which character you control at any given time, so the challenge comes more from figuring out where the developers want you to go next than from the difficulty of the battles and puzzles. Even so, *Tormented* is a supremely worthy successor to the most-frightening throne. | *Joe Rybicki*

VERDICT More terrifying than the first game—which is saying an awful lot.

SCORE 4.5 | 5



One neat feature of *Tormented* is the investigative element that takes place in the daytime world. Using the darkroom in Rei's house, you can develop photos taken in the dream world. Hand them off to Miku and she'll research them and get back to you.



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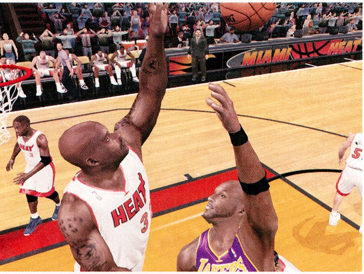
by Rick O'Connor



PUB. 2K Sports DEV. Visual Concepts ESRB E MSRP $39.99

NBA 2K6

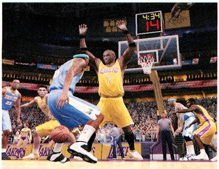
SIMULATION IN EVERY SENSE OF THE WORD

Most of the time, sports series with annual release schedules undergo few changes from year to year due to a "if it isn't broken, don't fix it" mentality among sports developers. But even with everything that worked in *NBA 2K5*, Visual Concepts hasn't really taken the philosophy to *2K6*. In fact, *2K6* is a testament to what happens when a developer listens to fans of its games and makes changes as necessary to craft the ultimate sports-game experience.

So you can understand why just about every single problem in *2K5* has been addressed in *2K6*. First of all, the controls are now incredibly streamlined, with all ball movement, including jukes, relegated to the left analog stick. It's a little awkward at first since most basketball games have been using the right analog stick for ball movement, but the controls feel natural after a few games. You'll also notice that the right analog stick is used for taking shots, and again, it feels a little weird at first, but you'll quickly wonder how you ever played any other way.

Also, thanks to top-notch AI, you absolutely have to learn how to use these controls effectively: Driving to the basket for an uncontested shot takes some skill and strategy, and stealing takes much more than just wildly slapping at the ball carrier. You have to play *NBA 2K6* like it's the real deal. Sure, you can go to the 24/7 mode for a little bit of a departure, but most basketball fans will want to stick to the main game and its Association mode, which has essentially become a streamlined franchise mode with useful year-round scouting options and better practice sessions to improve your players' abilities.

So it's an undeniably great game—it's just not meant for the casual player, who might be better off with something like *NBA Live 06* or even Sony's *NBA 06*. | *Giancarlo Varanini*



TAKE NOTES

NBA 2K6 illustrates what developers can do to improve sports games year after year, and what happens when they listen to fans for once.

PROS Excellent presentation, easily the best AI in basketball, good controls

CONS Controls take some getting used to, bit of a learning curve because of the AI, for hardcore b-ball fans only

SCORE 4.5 | 5

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PUB. Sony CEA **DEV.** 989 Sports **ESRB** E **MSRP** $39.99

NBA 06

NEEDS A TIME-OUT

***NBA 06* essentially continues** the trend set by previous 989 Sports games in that it tries to introduce something new and worthwhile to a genre that has become somewhat boring—and as usual, while the idea is a good one, other parts of the game detract from it and ultimately bring it down. Not that the new The Life mode is totally original. Story modes have existed in sports games for a while, but *NBA 06* is the first game to apply the concept in the traditional 5-on-5 basketball setting.

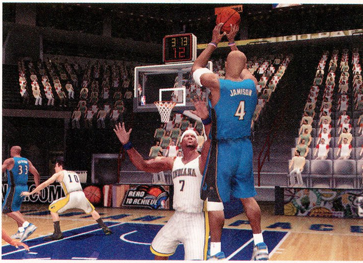
And it works well—for the most part. Starting the game as a lowly rookie takes some patience, probably more than you're willing to deal with, because your skills just aren't up to par. To put it simply, there are so many small fundamental problems—the passing feels stiff and has some weird bugs that cause the ball to fly off in random directions (not to mention the fact that the AI, while mostly consistent, does have a tendency to cheat a little bit when intercepting passes, at least more than any human opponent would); the juke moves aren't nearly as responsive as they should be, making it difficult to really burn an opponent; steals use weak canned animations, so for a second or so, you lose control of the player; and last, the shooting-meter mechanic seems woefully inconsistent at times, almost to the point where it just doesn't make any sense.

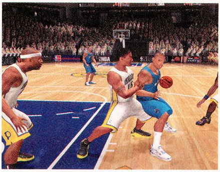
Still, you can probably overlook some of these shortcomings to get through The Life mode since its objective-based nature can make it addictive, and the story is about as entertaining as it gets for a sports game. But once you're done with that, there's little reason to keep playing—not even online.

On top of all that, *NBA 06* needs a little bit more polish in the visuals department. Many of the presentation elements are OK, particularly those in The Life mode, but the rest of the game, including player models, doesn't look all that sharp. Maybe next year will be 989's time to shine. | *Giancarlo Varanini*

THREE POINTS The new The Life mode is fun but fundamental problems hurt it overall
AIR BALL Lots of minor flaws make for a bumpy experience, visuals need work

SCORE 3|5





NEW COURT SMELL
Like previous 989 Sports games, *NBA 06* brings some new things to the table: The Life mode is an interesting new take on the world of basketball.

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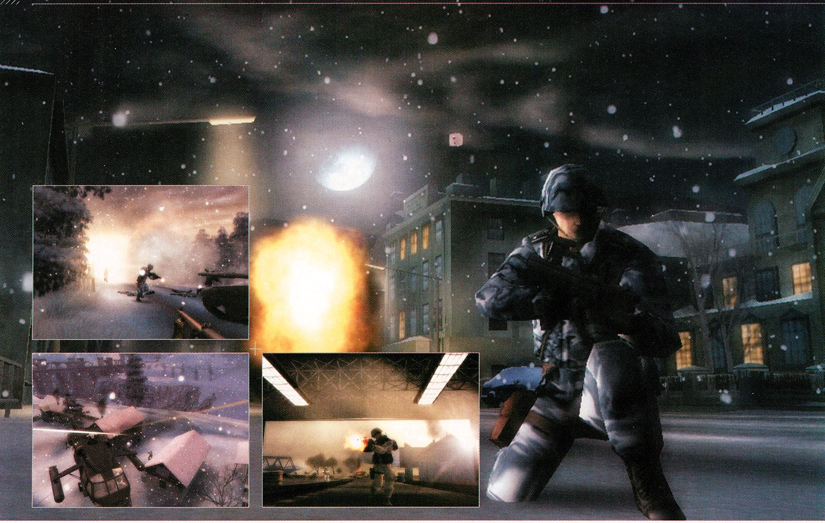


PUB. Electronic Arts DEV. Digital Illusions CE ESRB T MSRP $49.99

BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT

THIS MODERN WORLD

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the popular multiplayin', tank detonatin', plane bombin' game (or if your dusty Commodore 64 just can't handle the PC games), I'm happy to say that *Battlefield 2: Modern Combat* is here for consoles. The super-duper addictiveness that comes with the *Battlefield* brand is still there on PS2, without losing much to the scaled-down 24-player maps. It may not leave you all cotton-mouthed and itchin' for more, like those PC junkies are, but the PS2 version delivers and could cajole peace-loving hippies into supporting another war, as long as the series promised to pump out a sweet war game based on it.

Too often I'll start out with an online game and be really psyched about its cool features, but after a month, the magic's just not there anymore, and baby, I'm just going through the motions. However, *Battlefield 2*'s multiplayer has enough sexy things in its closet to spice things up and keep that relationship going strong.

Sure, the maps have shrunk in the transition from PC to console, and some classes suffer from it, like the sneaky sniper. However, each class has two main weapons, so if snipers are bored of camping at a tower, they can bring out their laser pointers and target tanks for an air strike, as if creating the sweetest PowerPoint presentation in the world. The medics are only packing three medkits, but who really cares when they're outfitted with a machine gun so large that it'd make Rambo feel insecure? Plus, the vehicles are easy enough to control that you won't feel like you need a designated driver for that tank or chopper. Once you're on the battlefield, the action never stops—you'll giddily charge to that next flag as if it were giving out candy.

And *Battlefield 2* could have stopped there, but it brought something to the table for the antisocial wallflowers who refuse to play with others: a decent single-player campaign. It throws you in the mix with goals like protecting an oil rig or detonating a submarine, and you're surrounded by enough reinforcements to offer an experience very similar to the multiplayer game. Especially helpful is the kinky-sounding "hotswapping" feature, which lets you zip across the map like Swayze's ghost and possess engineers as if they were kick-ass Whoopi Goldbergs armed with rocket launchers.

> ONCE YOU'RE ON THE BATTLEFIELD, THE ACTION NEVER STOPS.

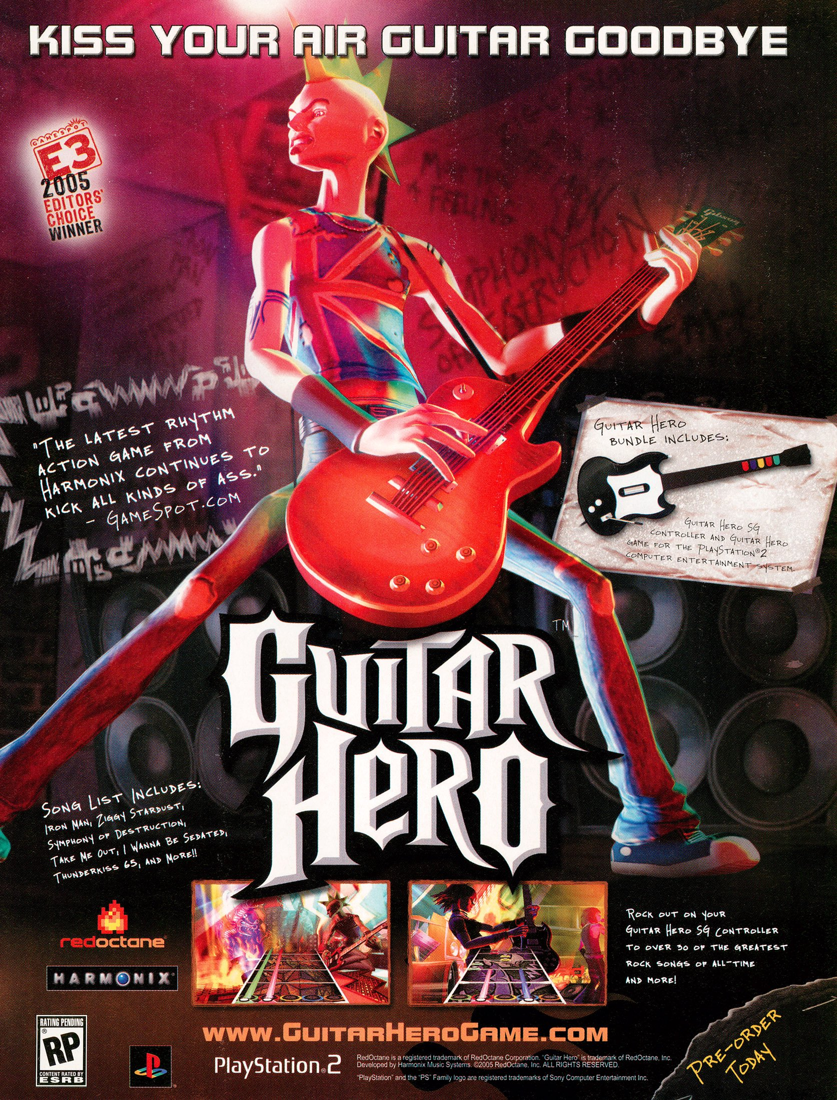
Modern Combat loses some points for its lack of realism (some guns don't have any recoil, for example) and forgettable story line (something about Kazakhstan), but it still serves as a decent war game for those of us too fragile to enlist. | *James Lee*

VERDICT Addictive multiplayer and the "army of one" single-player game are more interesting than those stupid commercials.

SCORE 4|5

PLAY FOR CASH

As of this writing, sign-ups had just begun for EA and GameSpy's Best of the Battlefield online tournament. EA plans to award $250,000 to the best clan in the land, with hefty $50K and $10K prizes to runners-up.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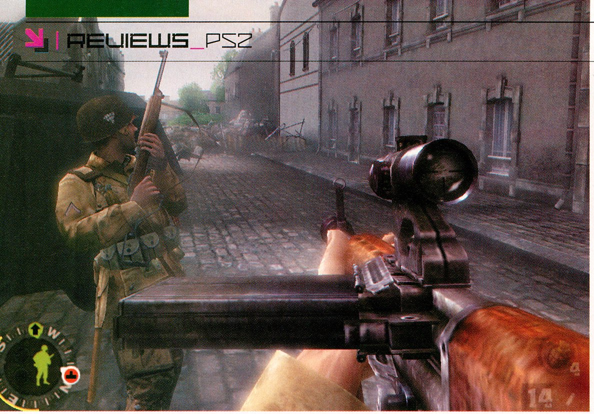


Gearbox hasn't toned down the gorgeous graphics of the original game; few other war games offer such a lush, detailed setting for all that sweet, sweet killing.

PUB. Ubisoft DEV. Gearbox Software ESRB M MSRP $49.99

BROTHERS IN ARMS: EARNED IN BLOOD

THERE ARE ALWAYS MORE NAZIS TO BE KILLED

I love gory games. Sure, there's a big debate about violence in videogames nowadays, but let me tell you: I've been playing since "videogame violence" involved stomping on the heads of mushroom-looking brown things, and I have *yet* to kill a single person! But more important, I'm one of the few gamers who doesn't groan at the thought of "another war game," just as long as I can point a rocket launcher in a Nazi's face.

So, I welcomed a sequel to *Brothers in Arms* even though it's been barely a year since the first game came out. The original stood apart other war games because it calmed my bloodlust—you couldn't rush into bunkers all by your lonesome with guns blazing and hope to take them over. The sequel gives you more of the same by having you act like a bossy bastard as you order your troops to suppress fire while you flank, but this time the enemies aren't easily fooled by those old magician tricks of distracting them with smoke and loud noises while you come at them from behind. I found them retreating, or—those sons of bitches—even trying to outmaneuver me!

This time you're playing as Red, that other dude in the previous game—y'know, that red-headed sergeant you saw for a split-second before you started mashing buttons to skip the damn cut-scene—and truth be told, you'll get a little red from frustration because this game is damn hard. *Earned in Blood* requires strategy and complete attention; you'll have to keep an eye on your soldiers' positions in addition to how much ammo's left for your trigger-happy ass. Thankfully, when the going gets tough, you can call a time out thanks to the situational awareness system, which allows you a bird's-eye view of the battlefield for planning advanced tactics.

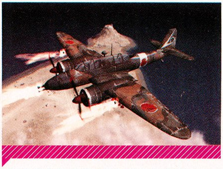
The whole package has a polished look. I even watched a few cut-scenes long enough to figure out that the title *Earned in Blood* makes reference to how Red tries to gain his fellow soldiers' trust. And *Brothers in Arms* is beginning to earn our trust, too—as not just "another war game." | *James Lee*

VERDICT A war game that demands more than just holding the trigger.

SCORE 4|5

IN THE STREETS

Developer Gearbox enlisted the aid of Col. John Antal, U.S. Army (Retired), to ensure the accuracy of *Brothers in Arms*. In October, Ubisoft released a document entitled "Urban Tactics 101," in which Antal lays out strategy for fighting in the streets. According to Antal, *Earned in Blood* "offers more real-life WWII urban combat than any other videogame on the market."



HEROES OF THE PACIFIC

KICK THE TIRES AND LIGHT THE...UM, PROPELLERS

PUB. EA DEV. EA Canada ESRB T MSRP $49.99

Usually when we have to review a game after it's already been released, it's a good bet said game isn't worth the plastic the disc is made of. Surprisingly, though, *Heroes of the Pacific* is a very competent—if slightly underwhelming—arcade dogfighter. It's also very refreshing, considering we're actually getting a World War II game that isn't a first-person shooter.

It's nothing to get really excited over from a presentation standpoint. *Heroes* looks decent, suffers from only a few framerate problems and nicely re-creates the sounds of war—both the Japanese Zeroes whizzing by you in an aerial game of chicken and the antiaircraft fire exploding all around you.

Where *Heroes* gets it right, though, is the gameplay. It does a spectacular job of creating the tension one expects to feel when engaging in a deadly game of cat and mouse thousands of feet above the ocean with enemies coming at you from just about any direction.

And it's not the same type of experience we all got with the latest *Ace Combat*, either. The planes here—both Japanese and American—are woefully underpowered, propeller-driven machines that simply won't make supertight turns or pull out of steep climbs. Learning what your plane can and can't do is actually part of the strategy, as oftentimes I found myself getting drawn in to steep climbs while pursuing my enemy, stalling the engine, and ending up in the drink. Likewise, going into a nosedive and using the momentum to pull out and give chase to escaping planes is the best way to complete some missions.

With intense, yet user-friendly, action and a full complement of online modes, *Heroes of the Pacific* is actually worth checking out. It's not going to blow *Ace Combat* out of the sky, but this game's got wings. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT While not the greatest dogfighting game, *Heroes* should appeal to WWII buffs craving something besides staring down the sights of an M1.

SCORE 3.5|5

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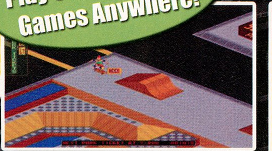

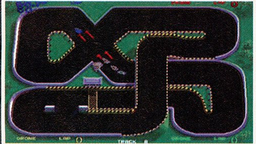

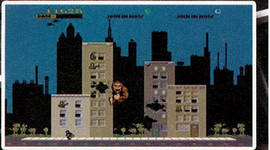

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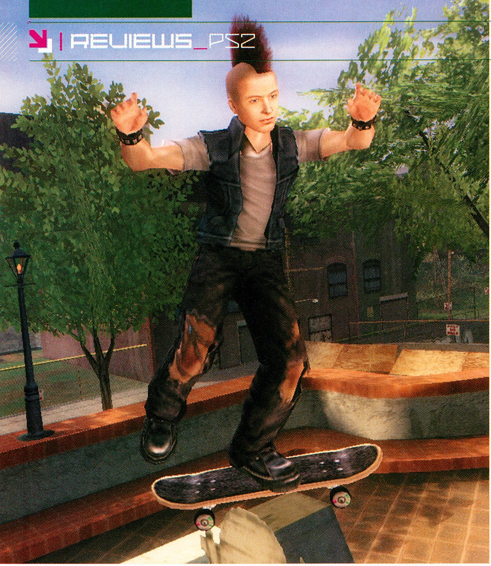
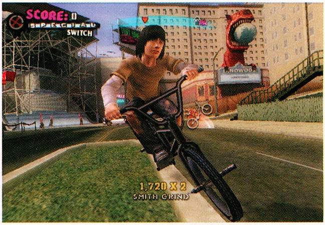
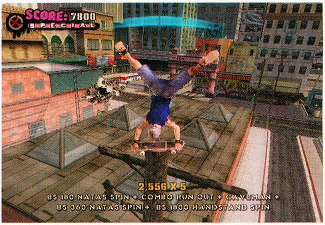
MIDWAY






SCORE: 7800
SPECIAL
2,556 X 5
BS 180 NATAS SPIN + COMBO RUN OUT + CAVEMAN +
BS 360 NATAS SPIN + BS 1800 HANDSTAND SPIN

PUB. Activision DEV. Neversoft ESRB T MSRP $49.99

TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND

MALL-PUNK DISNEYLAND

We're off to Los Angeles, setting of the seventh game in the *Tony Hawk* series and a city where, apparently, skate punks mug you for not dressing cool. No worries, as soon as you buy some rad shirts from totally hip brands like Quicksilver, Element, and Tony Hawk's own Birdhouse, you're gonna skate right over there and take your wallet back. On your way over, why not customize your Sirius Satellite radio playlist? And if you run into any trouble, I'll text message you on your Nokia phone.

American Wasteland pathetically mimes punk-rock and skater style and attitude, but it's just another fashion accessory for conspicuous-consumption junkies. The original idea was great: allow players to freely skate around Los Angeles in the mid-'80s heyday of the city's punk and skateboarding explosion. If *Wasteland* had aspired to the flashback authenticity of *Vice City*, it could have been the shocking reinvention the series desperately needs. But developer Neversoft wouldn't have been able to fill the disc with modern product placements or load the soundtrack with modern mall-punk covers of classic punk tunes. More importantly, it wouldn't have been able to pile on the ridiculously bloated set of tricks and maneuvers that have masqueraded as progress in the series for years.

Wasteland has a serious case of feature creep. Like many constantly updated franchises, the game has developed an impenetrable set of scattered modes and moves, the thick residue of yearly expansion. The new Bert slide and stall moves follow in the footsteps of last year's nautilus spin as moves that quickly end a combo. But wait, there's more: Now you can continue a combo on foot via a smattering of parkour moves (that's freestyle running…yep). And if you're sick of skateboarding, you can hop on a BMX bike.

> ANOTHER FASHION ACCESSORY FOR CONSPICUOUS-CONSUMPTION JUNKIES.

But the underlying game here is the same one we've been playing for years. Yes, *Wasteland* has a large, free-roaming world, but it does little to change the game itself. Which brings us to the most frustrating thing about *Wasteland*: After all these years, skating long, insane combos remains stubbornly entertaining. The story and missions exist only to highlight the combo lines in a brand-new skate spot, and I still had a good time exploring. | *Robert Ashley*

VERDICT A bloated but solid addition to the perpetual sequel machine.

SCORE 3.5 | 5

CLASSIC MODE
Veteran players who tire of relearning their skating techniques over the course of *Wasteland*'s story mode can skate through a collection of old-school *Tony Hawk* levels in the time-limited classic mode.

"5/5 STARS" – Maxim Magazine

"CLEARLY...THE LEXUS OF PSP CASES" – Pocket Games

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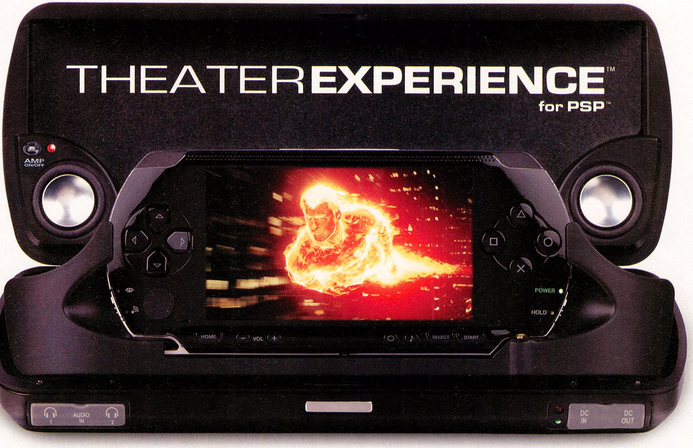
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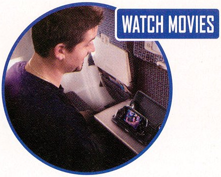
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OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE
GAME OF THE MONTH

PUB. Ubisoft **DEV.** Ubisoft France **ESRB** T **MSRP** $49.99

PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG

KING OF THE SILVER SCREEN

No matter how many times it happens, I just can't get used to the seamless way *King Kong* transitions from cut-scene to gameplay. One second I'm watching the comically fearless movie director Carl Denham (perfectly voiced by Jack Black) set up another shot for his real-life monster movie, the next I'm staring dumbly at my costars, waiting for something to happen. Half a minute goes by until I finally break my stupor: "Oh, I'm playing now."

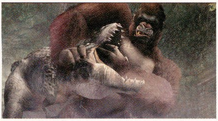
Yes, games have been headed in a cinematic direction for a long time, but anyone who pays careful attention to movies will tell you that even the most devout film-worshiping games fail to get the details right. *King Kong* won't dazzle you like *Metal Gear*'s virtuoso visuals or *Grand Theft Auto*'s style and atmosphere, but it gets the *feel* of a good flick better than either.

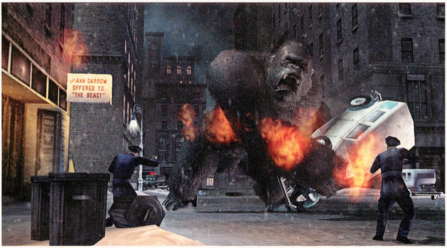
The most obvious difference is *King Kong*'s lack of the life bars, ammo inventory, character names, and maps that fill the edges of the screen in most games. In *King Kong*, you know you're hurt when your vision blurs, an effect that increases with damage, becoming more and more intense along with the music. As for checking on your ammo, tapping the Circle button makes Jack (your character through most of the game) think out loud about his supply: "Three magazines on backup." It sounds crazy, but it works so well that I wouldn't be surprised to see this uncluttered approach become the new standard.

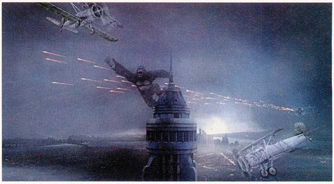
But it's the subtle, thoughtful stuff that really impresses me. The majority of the game plays as a nontraditional first-person shooter, but *Kong*'s inventive control scheme forces you to hold down a shoulder button in order to draw your gun. Not only does it make the experience feel more real, but it also means that whenever you're not fighting, your view is unmarred and wide open. It creates the impression that you're the movie's cameraman, capturing the action as it happens.

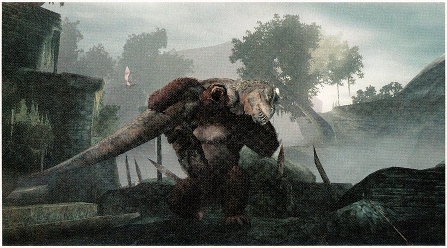
> KONG PRESENTS THE DRAMATIC RISE AND FALL OF A GOOD MOVIE.

As the cameraman, you're bound to notice how different the pace of *King Kong* is compared to most games. Instead of constantly ratcheting up the difficulty, throwing a greater number of more challenging enemies at you, *Kong* presents the dramatic rise and fall of a good movie. Your island-explorer companions build tension without action as they scan the jungle for danger, breathing heavily, nervously chit-chatting among the creepy scenery. You might stumble on a small surprise ambush (a few giant centipedes, say) and quickly defeat them, only to find yourself staring down the jaws of a giant T-Rex. And when that rare big fight happens, *Kong* really pours it on. The musical score ramps up as Ms. Darrow (the blonde-bombshell actress) lets out a scream and you struggle to keep yourself armed. Ammo is in short supply on the island, but the game generously places spears throughout, which are actually more fun to use. The lack of ammo also means









NEW YORK, NEW YORK
The final 10 minutes of *King Kong* take place in New York City, perfectly re-creating some of the moments from the classic 1933 movie, like Kong's infamous scaling of the Empire State Building and subsequent fight against the planes that are trying to take him down.

that *Kong* avoids the droning sound of constant gunfire most shooters spew from your speakers.

Kong is a masterpiece of minimalism, weaving a compelling (if short) experience with a few carefully considered elements. Skull Island has only a handful of hostile creatures. It makes do with—when compared to other shooters—a bare-bones assortment of guns, though you'll mostly use the spears. The puzzle elements are all variations on a theme (think of torch and fire puzzles in modern *Zelda* games). By resisting the urge to complicate things, the game makes the most of every element.

Though you're always on the beaten linear path, the way you deal with the giant centipedes, velociraptors, and other creatures you run into remains open. If you have ammo, you can waste it all on clearing the screen, or you can conserve, take cover, and pick the bad guys off with spears. You can often set traps for the bigger, tougher beasts, luring them into dry patches of brush, then setting the brush on fire. My personal favorite option is taking advantage of the island's food chain. Because the monsters are limited to only a few species, the game lays out a pecking order. The big stuff eats the small stuff. It's a cool idea that connects to the general theme of the movie: Namely, if you think the way creatures in the jungle treat each other is cruel, you ought to see the way supposedly civilized people act.

Which brings us to *King Kong*'s real protagonist, the giant gorilla himself. Though you control Kong in only a few short segments, he's definitely the star of the game. Shifting from a vulnerable, scared human character to the unstoppable king of the jungle is the ultimate power pellet. Giant creatures that are impossible for Jack and crew to kill are helpless in the grip of Kong. What's amazing about these sections is how extremely simple the gameplay is. Kong swings through the trees like a giant, furry Prince of Persia, but without any real possibility of falling (the time frame for hitting the button is very wide). The epic battles between Kong and packs of T-Rexes play like a button-mashing wrestling game, with Kong handily disposing of his foes. But the cinematic presentation; dramatic, shifting camera angles; and moody lighting keep you from noticing the simplicity. Kong radiates the ultimate gaming feeling: being a total badass. | *Robert Ashley*

VERDICT Short but sweet, *Kong*'s an innovative movie/game hybrid.

SCORE 4.5 | 5

THE KONG COLLABORATION
Peter Jackson, *Lord of the Rings* director, handpicked Ubisoft's Michel Ancel to create the *King Kong* game after playing Ancel's cult hit *Beyond Good & Evil*. While Jackson's hand in the game can be seen in the cinematic presentation, Ancel is present in the meticulous design, simple controls, and clever puzzles.

From Russia With Love is, apparently, Sean Connery's favorite *Bond* film, which perhaps explains why the 75-year-old actor chose to lend his vocal chops to the game.

PUB. EA Games **DEV.** EA Redwood Shores **ESRB** T **MSRP** $49.99

007: FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

RETURN TO SENDER, WITH INDIFFERENCE

To answer the most pressing question: Yes, it really is Sean Connery lending his voice to this game, and yes, it does indeed sound weird to hear 75-year-old Connery aping 33-year-old Sean Connery. His smooth-talking Scottishness also happens to be the main highlight in what is otherwise a mediocre follow-up to the excellent *007: Everything or Nothing*.

Like *EON*, *FRWL* is a third-person action game filled with shooting, car chases, gadgets, and women. Unlike *EON*, which has an original story, *FRWL* is an adaptation of a Bond film—which leads to its inconsistent pacing. *FRWL* is a fine movie that mixes action with slower-paced, yet more intriguing, espionage. In contrast, the game not only focuses on the more actiony bits from the movie (which is just fine, mind you) but adds additional action-packed areas that don't feel consistent with the rest of the game. The beginning involves a jetpack-versus-helicopter duel near Big Ben, while the end involves robots, nuclear missiles, and a jetpack-versus-trapped-fighter-jet duel. It almost feels as though two different games were jammed together.

Besides this odd pacing, the rest of the game feels easier and more rushed than *EON*. The vehicle chase sequences are neither as crazy as *EON's* motorcycle chase across the Pontchartrain Bridge nor as over-the-top as *EON*'s early helicopter chase. Levels are fewer in number and physically smaller, plus they're very straightforward run-and-shoot affairs (nothing here approaches *EON*'s visceral and imaginative jump-off-the-cliff level).

Sure, the production values are a bit better in *FRWL* (I particularly like shooting grenades off of the enemies' belts) and there are some decent gameplay tweaks, but the overall game is just plain easier and more sedentary feeling when compared to the previous game. It's as though the team used everything it had in *EON* and had only some leftovers to make *FRWL* with. Then again, it's still pretty cool to play as Sean Connery. | *Thierry Nguyen*

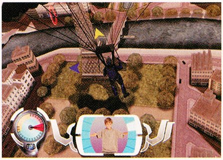
PLAY IT

Sample your own virtual Sean Connery by playing the demo on this month's disc.

CONNERY Stars Sean Connery! Decent gameplay tweaks and action

LAZENBY It's "decent" but nowhere near as spectacular as the previous Bond game

SCORE 3 | 5



EYETOY: OPERATION SPY

MORE LIKE SPYTOY

PUB. Sony CEA **DEV.** Sony CEE
ESRB E **MSRP** $29.99

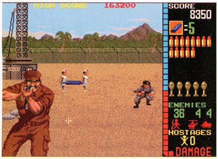
If your significant other has ever been creeped out by the EyeToy camera nestled atop your television, here's a real reason for them to worry: *Operation Spy* takes pictures and video at a much higher resolution than previous games have shown the EyeToy to be capable of, and you can set it up to record remotely, switching on when the camera senses motion.

Of course, this feature is part of a suite of room-security toys directed at privacy-deprived tweens, certainly not intended for abuse. Certainly not. No, sir. The other functions are innocent enough. A facial-recognition program will supposedly map the faces of your friends (and foes) and then discern who's who, denying access to the unwanted younger siblings, exiled friends, and other riffraff. But even assuming your group of tweeny-bopper friends is submissive enough to jump through hoops to get into your Ashlee Simpson-poster-plastered room, the facial recognition is spotty. It usually finds the results of its long scan process "inconclusive." There's also an alarm system that allows you to mark certain objects in your room with motion sensor tags. If someone comes in to try to sneak a peek into your diary, the alarm will trip, triggering a warning video you record yourself: "Oh no, you didn't try to look at my diary, Billy!" Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to work at any significant distance.

But wait, this is a game, right? *Operation Spy* tosses in a set of lackluster espionage-themed minigames ranging from annoying to mildly entertaining—obviously an afterthought. I dug the skydiving game, a *Pilotwings*-esque drop through aerial hoops and onto rooftop targets. Other than that, though, the games are hardly worth a mention. *Operation Spy* definitely reinforces the "toy" part of EyeToy. | *Robert Ashley*

VERDICT A spycam for pervs and diary-scribbling tweens

SCORE 2 | 5



TAITO LEGENDS

MORE TALL TALE THAN LEGEND

PUB. Sega DEV. Taito

ESRB T MSRP $19.99

Hey, a classic arcade compilation from Taito, creator of such phenomenal arcade games as *Qix*, *Arkanoid*, *Darius*, and *Raystorm*! None of which is in this collection. While Japan gets a two-volume collection called *Taito Memories* that features about twice as many games and far more good titles, we have to deal with *Taito Legends*, which features four decent games and 25 lame ones.

Some you might remember include *Space Invaders*, *Elevator Action*, *Operation Wolf*, *Rastan*, *Jungle Hunt*, *Super Qix* (we get the sequel, but no original?), and *The New Zealand Story*. You've never heard of the rest, and they're not exactly "legendary"—although it might be fun to play garbage like *Gladiator* or *Ninja Kids* while under the influence.

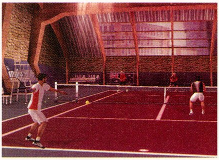
But my money says that if you buy this, you'll buy it for *Bubble Bobble* and its sequel, *Rainbow Islands*. Fair enough. For what it's worth, all the bubble-blowin', rainbow-throwin' gameplay you love is replicated perfectly here. If only the other games were re-created as well.

Most disappointingly, every game that originally used a vertical monitor orientation is "stretched" to fit on standard TVs. This sucks. Especially in the case of *Space Invaders*, which looks more like the Atari 2600 version, pulled like a comic strip on Silly Putty. There's not even an option to add color, as there was in the Japan-only *Space Invaders Anniversary* collection. Nor is there a button-reassignment option.

Taito Legends does include a few bonus features, like video interviews with a few game designers, gameplay tips, cheat codes, and (poor-quality) scans of original sales flyers. But I'd give all that up for *Elevator Action Returns*, *Darius Twin*, or *Puzzle Bobble*. | *Chris Kohler*

VERDICT Getting 29 games for $20 shouldn't be a terrible deal, but aside from two or three gems, the selection totally blows—especially when compared to the Japanese releases.

SCORE 1.5 | 5



TOP SPIN

A TENNIS CASTAWAY

PUB. 2K Sports DEV. Power and Magic

ESRB E MSRP $39.99

Tennis doesn't exactly have the same stature as many other sports. This means there's no standby—no *Madden* of tennis—and little consistency from year to year. Fans must gamble on whichever publisher's willing to take a chance on the sport. This year, 2K Sports brings *Top Spin*, a series it actually bought from Microsoft.

In fact, the PS2 version of *Top Spin* is essentially a port of the 2-year-old Xbox game of the same name. Nothing was gained, and fortunately, very little was lost in the transition; however, a host of tiny flaws have been introduced.

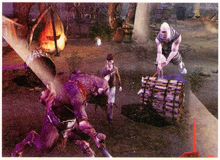
Outside of the core gameplay, *Top Spin* feels clunky and sloppy. Frequent load times, both long and short, interrupt its flow. Graphically, it fares little better than a PSP game, with bland environments and creepy doll-like representations of its tennis pros. The create-a-player mode also feels quite basic, and the world map in the career mode runs like a dog.

On the other hand, the game's developers really understand tennis. The gameplay is a bit slower than what you'd find in Sega's recent *Virtua Tennis: World Tour* for PSP, but there's much more control over the ball, with several types of shots and ball physics that exceed most anything we've seen before on the courts. There's also an online mode, the game's other saving grace—mainly for its novelty. There can be lag even over a speedy connection, but in general things are plenty playable.

By offering better ball physics and an online mode, *Top Spin* does manage to edge out the competition—but the game's look and feel screams "budget game." The fact that it's a sloppy rehash of a 2-year-old Xbox game hurts—whether or not you played the original. | *Christian Nutt*

VERDICT Fundamentally a very accomplished game of tennis, but a whole can of polish should have been slapped on to make this one really shine.

SCORE 3 | 5



THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA: THE LION, THE WITCH, AND THE WARDROBE

CLOSET COLLECT-A-THON

PUB. Buena Vista Games DEV. Traveller's Tales

ESRB T MSRP $49.99

The good news about *Narnia* is that you don't have to be a fan of the lion, the witch, or even the wardrobe to find some decent game design. The bad news is that it doesn't live up to its potential.

Narnia's action is split up into a series of distinct levels that are introduced by and concluded with clips taken directly from the film. In a unique twist, the scenes transition immediately into polygonal graphics—there's a jarring distinction, but the lack of interstitial load times helps create a much more immersive experience.

In each level, you'll control two to four children, whom you can select between by tapping R1. At any time, a second player can jump in—which is preferable, since computer-controlled characters don't help out much and enemies usually gang up on whomever you're controlling.

Each of the children has different powers—Peter and Edmund excel at melee combat, Lucy can heal, and Susan can use projectiles—so you'll have to switch between them to solve puzzles.

Of course, the game has to lead you around by the nose, actually telling you which character to use in different situations by way of placing icons of their faces in the environment. Better level design would have made this unnecessary. The melee combat is competent, but when many enemies are onscreen, things turn into a bit of a button-mashing clusterf***.

And though there are certainly a lot of bonus features (secret levels, making-of videos, etc.), to unlock them you've got to go through the levels and find hundreds of hidden little doodads, which is not especially entertaining. | *Chris Kohler*

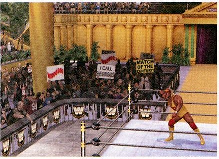
LION Graphics and film scenes are nice, character-switching gameplay is novel

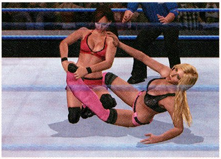
WITCH Confusing combat, too-obvious puzzles, short levels

SCORE 2.5 | 5

DRINK OF LEGEND
Taito was established in 1953 by Michael Kogan, a Jewish Russian expatriate living in Tokyo. The company was originally an importer of amusement machines like popcorn makers and jukeboxes—as well as Japan's first domestic vodka brewer.

PEOPLE ≠ CARTOONS
The *Narnia* film is actually the live-action directorial debut of New Zealander Andrew Adamson… but since he directed *Shrek* and *Shrek 2*, there's little to worry about.





WWE Smackdown! vs. Raw 2006 is one of the growing number of PS2 games to include features unlockable only by syncing with the PSP version of the game.

PUB. THQ DEV. Yuke's ESRB T MSRP $49.99

WWE SMACKDOWN! VS. RAW 2006

THE BEST THERE IS, WAS, AND EVER WILL BE?

When you're a wrestling fan, it's the little things that count. While we all want a great-playing game, we also get our panties in a bunch when the game doesn't have the proper intros for our favorite wrestlers. Or doesn't have the perfect motion-captured signature moves. And so on and so forth.

It has to be said that *WWE 2006* is definitely heading in the right direction as far as getting the little things right. It's nice to see wrestlers who've entered the ring actually be standing there during subsequent fighter intros. It's great that I can't just hit someone endlessly without getting tired. It's excellent that I can choose to ignore a rope break command and maintain that choke hold just a little bit longer.

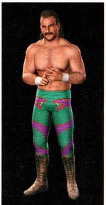
It's these little tweaks, combined with the already mostly solid game engine that we've grown to know and love—or hate—that make *WWE 2006* the best WWE game available on any system right now. Especially noteworthy is the addition of the stamina meter, which forces you to conserve energy. It makes the ebb and flow of each match a bit more enjoyable than the industry-standard grapple-after-grapple-after-grapple formula.

But notice I said "mostly solid game engine" there. *WWE 2006*, despite the new play elements, still suffers from a lot of the same blemishes it always has. Matches are still way too slow most of the time. Aiming issues make your wrestlers look clownish when they attempt to start a throw and instead just swing at air. And worst of all, tag-team partners—the bane of any wrestling game—are still dumb as dirt and simply don't do what they're told. Do I really have to tell my partner to stop my opponent from pinning me? These guys should at least come with the basic IQ of your average chimp.

It's nice to see *WWE 2006* taking a step in the right direction, starting to pull WWE games out of the rut they've been stuck in for years. This is easily the best WWE game to come out in quite a while, but the series still has a long way to go. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT Some very nice new features and play mechanics shake some—but not all—of the rust off this rickety series.

SCORE 3|5



SNAKE BEATER

Jake "The Snake" Roberts is one of the wrestling legends included this year. To unlock him, you must have a copy of *WWE 2006* for PSP.

PUB. Atari DEV. Spike ESRB T MSRP $49.99

DRAGON BALL Z: BUDOKAI TENKAICHI

A DBZ FAN'S DREAM

***Dragon Ball Z* games** are a funny sort of thing. You and I both know that people don't buy them for amazing gameplay—they buy the games because they're *Dragon Ball Z* fans. All the same, the games tend to be amusingly over the top, just like the show. *Tenkaichi* is no different in that regard, even though it's actually a fairly big change from the previous three *Budokai* games.

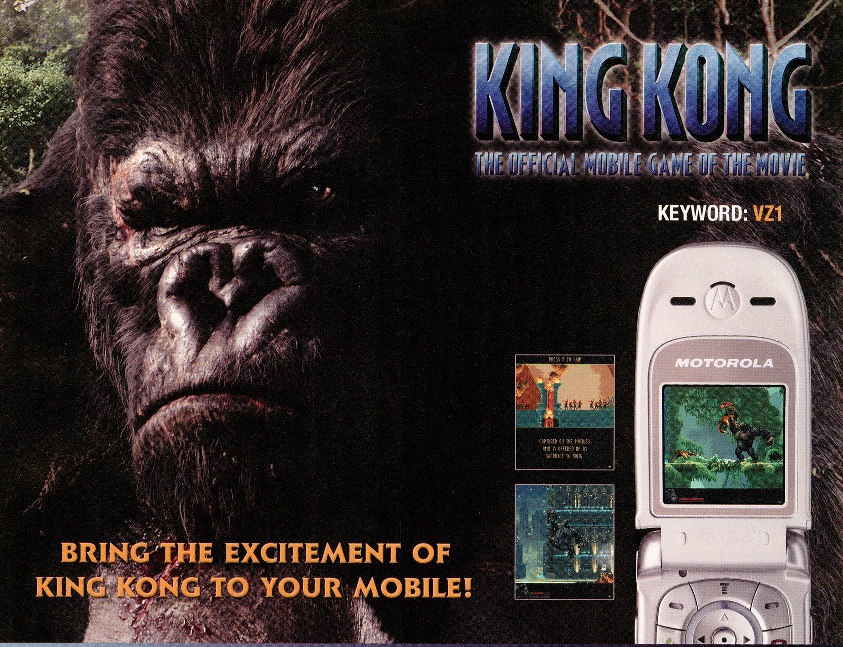
The good news is that it does a better job of mimicking the cartoon, with characters zooming around and battles boiling down to whoever gets off his most powerful, charged-up supermove first...or second, or maybe third. The gameplay is quite speedy—the way the fighters whiz around the battlefield and fly into the air, well...it's *Dragon Ball Z*, for sure, and it's not quite like anything else.

The problem, maybe, is that *Tenkaichi* is even less of a traditional fighting game than other titles in the series. Every facet of this game's play is designed to provide something that looks and feels like the fights in the TV show: massive (and repetitive) super-attacks, battlefields strewn with cover.... It all makes the thing a bit hard to grasp at first, especially if you're coming at it like it's a regular fighting game. It's definitely not.

This is actually kind of cool. *Tenkaichi* is a *Dragon Ball Z* game that's distinctly for the fans. If you have a pal who's into the show, buying this for its versus mode is a no-brainer; the story mode, on the other hand, sloppily recaps the cartoon. This game is fan material, and cleverly made fan material at that. If you're not an initiate, however, it's going to seem like nonsense. | *Christian Nutt*

VERDICT The gameplay is a bit awkward and quite repetitive, but no game has captured the feel of *Dragon Ball Z* quite like this.

SCORE 3|5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CAPTURED BY THE NATIVES ANN IS OFFERED UP AS SACRIFICE TO KONG.

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KEYWORD: VZ5

PLATINUM SOLITAIRE

KEYWORD: VZ6

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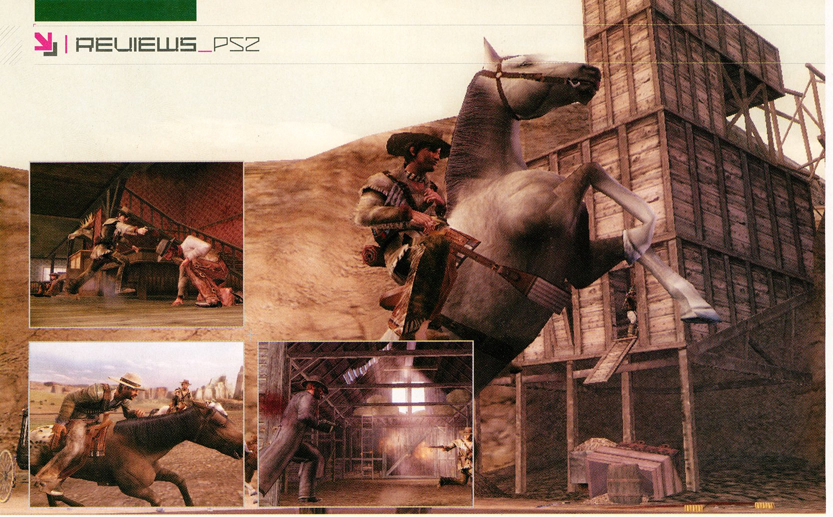


PUB. Activision DEV. Neversoft ESRB M MSRP $49.99

GUN

DEADWOOD, DEADER TOWN

It's kind of sad that there aren't more games based on Westerns, since the myth of the West is one of America's defining attributes. The West has everything: frontier exploration, epic violence, nefarious capitalists, horseplay, and flowing bottles of whiskey. Yet the only notable Western-themed game is *Red Dead Revolver*, and *Gun* now possesses the honor of being "the second Western game." *Gun* also happens to be Neversoft's first non–*Tony Hawk* game since *Spider-Man* for the PS1.

A glib way to describe *Gun* is to use the phrase "*GTA: Dodge City*," in that you have a free-roaming world filled with various side distractions all wrapped around a linear story told via missions. The story (about Colton White avenging the death of his father, Ned) pretty much hits the highlights of the genre, with segments including shoot-outs on steamboats and in brothels, Spanish gold, Indian raids, and dead fatherly vengeance. When you're not following the main story, you can do a variety of side missions, including Pony Express deliveries, cattle herding, and bounty hunting. In general, these are fun little distractions, and since completing them both increases your stats and earns you money (used to buy weapon upgrades), they're often necessary for you to complete before moving on to the next story mission. Controls are smooth, there's decent weapon variety (including pistols, shotguns, rifles, bows, and even swords), and the "quickdraw," the cowboy's term for bullet time, is enjoyable to use on multiple enemies.

While *Gun* tries to portray a vast, free-roaming landscape (à la *GTA*) of the West, there are significant obstacles it has to overcome. Population is a huge problem, as *Gun*'s two main areas feel like ghost towns, with a dearth of pedestrians on the streets and a surplus of abandoned buildings. It's not atypical to walk into a grand two-story bank and see three people inside. Also, the game world isn't that large—riding from Dodge to Empire (each is on the edge of the map) at full speed takes about two minutes. The AI is also inconsistent; it switches from serviceable (guys swarming at you or trying to use cover) to downright broken. In several instances, I could stand just outside the bad dude's detection range and shoot him in the head with my rifle, and no one would notice (I've been able to finish missions without a single shot fired at me this way). Finally, if you're expecting a *GTA*-style scope, be warned that one can finish the story mode in 12 hours (and that includes a good chunk of the side missions).

> A GLIB WAY TO DESCRIBE GUN IS TO USE THE PHRASE "GTA: DODGE CITY."

Personally, though, I'd say one particularly shining point is *Gun*'s stellar cast of crusty old men, with the likes of Kris Kristofferson (Whistler!), Lance Henriksen (Bishop!), Tom Skerritt (Viper!), Brad Dourif (Wormtongue!), and Ron Perlman (Beast!). Their awesome presence makes the solid yet unremarkable story into one where you want to finish the mission just to hear those aged cool guys yammer at each other. Also, despite its problems, *Gun* is generally fun to play and makes for a good first shot at a true Western. We can hope that Neversoft is spurred to make a better one next time. | *Thierry Nguyen*

THE GOOD Great setting, good action, fun horseback riding
THE BAD The West feels small and empty
THE UGLY You can scalp baddies, but there is no in-game benefit or reward for doing so

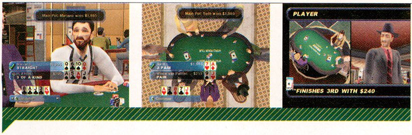
SCORE 3|5

PLAY IT

Check out the crusty old men yourself by playing the demo of *Gun* on this month's disc.

HISTORY LESSON

It's been said that scalping was a product of "Indian savages." Then there was the theory that Civil War soldiers introduced scalping to the Indians. The truth is scalping was started in Eurasia by the Scythians, who hung out in what is generally known as Azerbaijan nowadays.



PUB. 2K Sports **DEV.** Coresoft **ESRB** E **MSRP** $19.99

WORLD POKER TOUR

THE TOYOTA SCION OF POKER GAMES

If ever a game were about style over substance, this is it. That's not to say that *World Poker Tour* has no substance—just that its flash far outweighs its fundamentals.

This is the first videogame to give poker the professional-sports treatment (not surprising given the slick presentation of any event in the deep-pocketed WPT), and it does make a difference. The game boasts video profiles of its six pros, minilessons hosted by WPT's Shana Hiatt, real-life venues, and decent—if repetitive—commentary by Mike Sexton and Vince Van Patten.

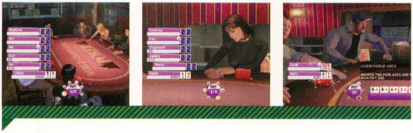
Below all this flash, though, is a run-of-the-mill product. While the game does include more play types than most (especially given the game editor, which allows you to set up basement-style games like Follow the Queen), when you actually get out on the felt, it's a disappointment. Players are generally timid and predictable, even on the WPT All-Stars difficulty setting, allowing a decent player to play through an entire career in a day or two. There's other stuff to keep you busy—like the amusing facial-expression control that lets you add veracity to a bluff—but it's a shame to see gameplay take a backseat to presentation. | *Joe Rybicki*

VERDICT Buy *WPT* if you watch poker; buy *WCP2* if you *play* poker.

SCORE 3 | 5

TIME IS MONEY

My favorite feature of *World Poker Tour* is the "fold and skip" option, which allows you to jump right to the next hand once you fold yours. By cutting out all the post-fold waiting, it makes the whole game a great deal more exciting.



PUB. Crave **DEV.** Point of View **ESRB** T **MSRP** $19.99

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POKER 2 FEATURING HOWARD LEDERER

THE STAKES HAVE BEEN RAISED

Before the arrival of cameras tiny enough to snoop while players check out their hole cards, watching poker was less interesting than watching a dog show. It was composed of a lot of empty staring with brief, infrequent moments of activity—hardly a recipe for TV excitement.

Which is why it's a crime for a poker game to come out without any means of speeding up hands that you're not involved in. In *WCP2*'s case, it's doubly offensive because the rest of the game is quite solid and, at its core, more serious than you might expect from its knobby exterior.

While presentation is a bit on the budget side, the game introduces some interesting ideas, from skill points to improve your poker face to physical tics you can observe in other players to see if they're bluffing.

More important, though, is the gameplay: You'll face a wide variety of opponents with a wide range of skills and playing styles, which means that you do need to know real poker to do well.

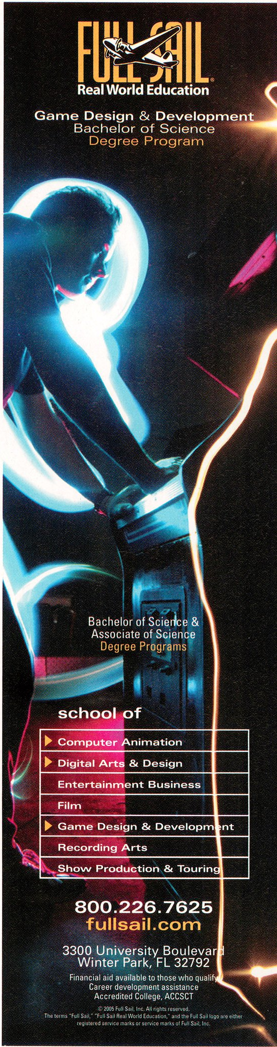
With better presentation and better training for newcomers, *WCP2* would be the big stack at the table. But as it is, it'll have to go heads-up against *World Poker Tour*. | *Joe Rybicki*

VERDICT The most challenging poker game yet—so newbies beware!

SCORE 3 | 5

PIMP YOUR PAD

As you accumulate cash and experience in *World Championship Poker 2*, you can earn or buy nifty new stuff to deck out your living space—which is where you host your frequent home games. It's a neat touch.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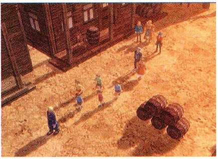

WILD ARMS ALTER CODE: F

PARTY LIKE IT'S 1997

PUB. Agetec DEV. Media.Vision
ESRB T MSRP $49.99

Back in the days of the PlayStation's pre–*Final Fantasy VII* RPG wasteland, it was easy for fairly mediocre role-playing games to look like diamonds in the rough. After all, when one of the era's biggest releases is the unquestionably horrendous *Beyond the Beyond*, it's hard to be choosy.

Wild Arms was one such diamond. Featuring decent music, a nice anime intro, a unique Western flavor, and one of the earliest attempts at 3D RPG battle scenes, it quickly gained a devoted cult following that's remained strong enough to support the series through two sequels, with a third on the way.

This gussied-up remake isn't just the same game with better textures, though. Developer Media.Vision has gone the same route Game Arts once did with *Lunar*, actually reimagining various aspects of the original game in an attempt to contemporize it. Fans are treated to a slightly altered plot, fully double the number of playable characters—we've gone from three to six—and a tweaked battle system that's supposed to feel a bit more dynamic than the standard turn-based fare.

Unfortunately, while the additions and tweaks are nice, none of them manages to elevate *Wild Arms* above average status. This is a wholly serviceable RPG that just doesn't stand out against games like *Dragon Quest VIII* or *Digital Devil Saga*. Despite the graphical update, the game still looks a tad old and crusty. The wandering camera and spiffy icon-driven menus don't really spruce up the battles that much, either, as most of them still come down to mashing one button over and over again, and the system provides only limited reasons to unleash special attacks or use strategy.

For fans of the series, *Alter Code: F* is worth playing, but it's not engaging enough to draw in anyone else. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT Fans of the series will no doubt dig the new features, but *Alter Code: F* remains simply decent.

SCORE 3 | 5

ARMED AND DANGEROUS
The term "ARM" in *Wild Arms* actually stands for Ancient Relic Machine.

Yue Jin
Private
Stop the Wei Forces from entering Shu's Main Camp!

DYNASTY WARRIORS 5: XTREME LEGENDS

NOT AN XTREME MAKEOVER

PUB. Koei DEV. Omega Force
ESRB T MSRP $29.99

Like some 12-headed Hydra sprouting tentacles by the minute, *Dynasty Warriors* can't seem to stop multiplying. Constantly growing, infinitely expanding, it feeds on the wallets of hapless collectors with a thin promise: The new one will always be better than the old one—better graphics, more characters, more attacks, more weapons, more everything.

The excessive sequels have always seemed fitting for a game that counts the number of soldiers you kill—always in the triple digits—as you clear-cut battlefield after battlefield. But there comes a time in every all-you-can-eat buffet when you wipe the giblet gravy from your mouth, loosen the drawstring on your sweatpants, and walk away. For my *Dynasty Warriors* binge, that time is now.

I get a stomachache just looking at the *Xtreme Legends* menu, bloated with extra modes, crammed to the gunwales with slightly modified versions of the last game. Do we really need 18 "new" levels? I think I've seen every possible configuration of castles, trees, rivers, and breakable vases by now. The only truly new feature in this set is the Destiny mode, in which you play as a weak foot soldier, slowly accruing power-ups and working your way up the chain of command. The thing about that is, after spending so many hours of my life playing this series, the last thing I want to do is start all over as a total wimp.

It is worth pointing out, though, that the tried-and-true formula still works. I still get that tingly feeling when I clear the field of a couple hundred dummy troops, but the formula is aging fast. Sega's remarkably solid *Spartan: Total Warrior* leapfrogged over *Dynasty Warriors* earlier this year in more ways than one. It's time for the series to either reinvent itself or retire. | *Robert Ashley*

IT GOES TO 11
This iteration marks the 11th installment of the *Dynasty* series. That's *Dynasty Warriors* through *DW5, DW3: Xtreme Legends, DW4: XL, DW5: XL, Dynasty Warriors 4: Empires*, plus side stories *Dynasty Tactics* and *Dynasty Tactics 2*.

VERDICT A game for zealous fans and gamers with damaged short-term memory.

SCORE 3 | 5

MAGNA CARTA: TEARS OF BLOOD

NO MORE TEARS

PUB. Atlus DEV. Softmax
ESRB T MSRP $54.99

Given the game's popularity, it's surprising that so few RPGs try this blatantly to be *Final Fantasy X*. From its swishy hero (and his naive, auburn-tressed love interest) to its cast of fashion-plate journeymen ranging through a world of mystery and strife, *Magna Carta* apes that landmark title in every superficial way.

Dig deeper, however, and you'll find a number of important differences. The storytelling is nowhere near as solid, for one. While the characters look good and the voice acting's OK, the dialogue sequences are short, stilted, and too simple to allow the player to develop a feeling of empathy for the characters. And the plot drags out that tiresome fantasy theme of a war between humans and elves (called yason here).

On the other hand, at least the battles don't thieve from *FFX*. The overriding impression I'm left with is that the developers took all the ideas they could think of—good or bad—and shoved them into the game. The result is kind of a mishmash that, when viewed as a whole, is almost a mess. You must keep an eagle eye on eight different elements while making sure to time your combos perfectly, or else you'll incur multiple heavy penalties. The slow pace and repetition of the combat, though, don't lend themselves to holding one's attention; my mind, at least, had a tendency to wander. The system manages to hold together, but it's hardly engrossing.

The end result looks and feels much like a Square Enix game, complete with slick graphics and a moody soundtrack that sets the tone nicely. *Final Fantasy, Star Ocean, Grandia*—they've all donated ideas to this escapade. But we're left with an adequate, sometimes engaging adventure that just has too many annoying little wrinkles that were never ironed out. | *Christian Nutt*

MAGNA Nice mood and graphics, cool character designs, a good presentation
DRAGNA The battles don't quite work, and the story is a mixed-up rehash of popular fantasy material

SCORE 3 | 5

GENTLEMEN, START YOUR ENGINES.

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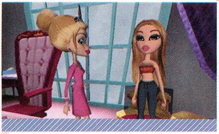


BRATZ: ROCK ANGELZ

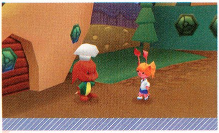
BOYS BEWARE. THIS IS DANGEROUS TERRITORY

PUB. THQ DEV. Blitz Games
ESRB E MSRP $39.99

When one of a group of teenage girlfriends loses her summer job at a fashion magazine, they get revenge by starting their own mag. It's your job to find articles to write; for each article there is a minigame, which earns you money to spend on clothes. The minigames are OK, but not challenging. This is fine for girls 9 to 12, but I don't recommend it for anyone else; you may have a nervous breakdown from all the sassy teenage girls wearing too much makeup. | *Sarah Jaisser Green*

VERDICT Decent for tween girls, not anyone else.

SCORE 2.5 | 5



NEOPETS: THE DARKEST FAERIE

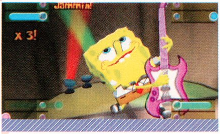
RPG 101

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Sony CEA
ESRB E MSRP $39.99

Based on the popular kids' Neopets website, *The Darkest Faerie* is kind of like an RPG with training wheels. Though there is no skill tree to upgrade, you're getting quests and adding magical elements to weapons and armor to increase their effectiveness. The lack of any overall map or compass can be frustrating, and the camera can be unwieldy. Parents should also know that there is no spoken dialogue outside of the cut-scenes, so kids should have decent reading skills if they're going to take this on. | *Dana Jongewaard*

VERDICT Good practice for aspiring Final Fantasizers.

SCORE 3.5 | 5



SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS: LIGHTS, CAMERA, PANTS!

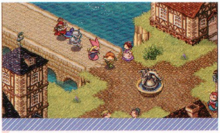
DOWN WHERE IT'S WETTER

PUB. THQ DEV. THQ Studio Australia
ESRB E MSRP $39.99

A wacky audition for an episode of SpongeBob's favorite TV show sets the scene for a party game featuring a nice mix of single and team-based challenges in more than 25 minigames. The huge selection of events keeps the game from getting boring, and the tight control keeps the frustration factor low. *SpongeBob* suffers a bit as a single-player game, since AI teammates often ruin your chances of winning. But as a multiplayer kids' game, it has a lot to like. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT A decent kids' game, but only if you've got at least two people playing.

SCORE 3.5 | 5



POPOLOCROIS

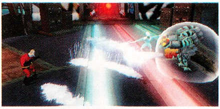
RPG 102

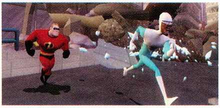
PUB. Agetec DEV. G-Artists
ESRB E MSRP $34.99

PoPoLoCrois isn't a shining piece of game design, and it's not much to look at either. But in all fairness, it's easy to see where really little kids (who probably shouldn't be holding a PSP in the first place, but never mind) might have fun with it—and if you're starving for a PSP role-playing game, this is pretty much your only choice, so you might as well make the best of it. But that doesn't mean you won't want to wean yourself off this baby food as soon as possible. | *Nich Maragos*

PROS Two games in one
CONS Both are bland and tedious

SCORE 2 | 5



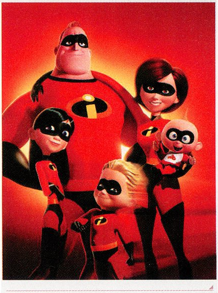


THE INCREDIBLES: RISE OF THE UNDERMINER

MORE LIKE THE ACCEPTABLES

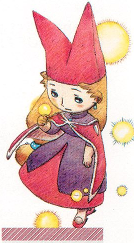
PUB. THQ DEV. Heavy Iron Studios
ESRB E MSRP $39.99

Until Disney sees fit to release pitiable direct-to-video sequels, *The Incredibles* is a single movie and story. How to make a second game, then? THQ has decided to pick up where the movie leaves off—the last scene, starring villain the Underminer. This is a good idea, but what wasn't: making this game a co-op-only experience. It's fun with a friend but abysmal alone. The AI that controls Frozone or Mr. Incredible when you don't have a friend to help is completely incapable of defending itself, let alone assisting you (and let's not even talk about its platforming skills). Consider this one if you've got a buddy, but stay far away if you're going solo. | *Christian Nutt*



VERDICT The voices are great, the gameplay's not half bad—but the AI is such an impediment that the fun quickly drains away.

SCORE 2.5 | 5

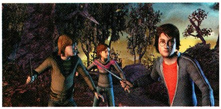


FUZZY MATH

PoPoLoCrois II is actually the third game in the series—Sony of Japan released *PoPo-Rogue*, a side story, between the original game and its sequel.

PHYSICS IS FUN!

According to the Internet Movie Database, *Incredibles* villain Syndrome's "zero-point" energy beam "is based on an actual physics concept, the zero-point field, demonstrated in 1948 via the Casimir Effect and essential to Stephen Hawking's theory that black holes eventually evaporate."



HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE

PERFECTLY ACCEPTABLE WIZARDING FUN

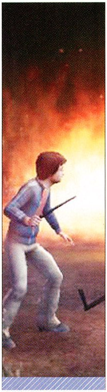
PUB. EA Games DEV. EA Games
ESRB E10+ MSRP $49.99

Unlike many movie games, this one doesn't spend time telling the story; in fact, if you haven't read the book or seen the movie, you won't have any context for what's happening. The game aims much higher than the typical marketing fodder, though, from its graphics (which look great) to its structure (which breaks beyond the typical sequence of minigames). Instead of switching among Ron, Hermione, and Harry as you go (like you do in *Prisoner of Azkaban*), you choose one character to play as at the beginning of each mission. You also have the option of adding one or two other players at the start of any mission.

Controls, sadly, are somewhat unwieldy and imprecise—you'll find yourself mistargeting your spells a lot unless you're pointed exactly the right way. The whole interface seems unnecessarily cluttered and multilayered—there were lots of little extra tasks that I ended up ignoring because it seemed too much of a pain to figure out what they were. And at points the lack of camera control ended up costing me health because I didn't see the dangers ahead until I was in the midst of them. Nevertheless, *The Goblet of Fire* is still a cut above its peers, and *Harry Potter* fans will certainly be thrilled. | Dana Jongewaard

HARRY Aims high, looks great
VOLDEMORT Often clumsy controls, overly complex interface

SCORE 3.5 | 5



Daniel Radcliffe, who plays Harry Potter, didn't like the books when he first read them, but getting paid a lot of money has probably changed that.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

Good games come out all year long, and a lot of them are great for kids to play. Some of our favorites from 2005 are listed below.

PS2
- EyeToy: Play 2
- Lego Star Wars
- Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves
- We Love Katamari

PSP
- Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee
- Lumines
- Namco Museum Battle Collection
- Virtua Tennis

FROGGER: HELMET CHAOS

HAT OF FRUSTRATION

PUB. Konami DEV. Hudson Soft
ESRB E MSRP $29.99

Whoever said the PSP would be a dumping ground for bland, downgraded versions of console games might have been thinking of *Frogger*. The confusing controls (why do I tap L and R to rotate a frog?) are here, and the increased difficulty and extended loading times of the PSP version mean you'll spend a lot of time waiting for the level to dredge itself up off the UMD every time you die. The included remake of the original arcade game is more fun. | Chris Kohler

VERDICT Somehow, the PSP version makes *Frogger*'s already-confusing mechanics even more frustrating.

SCORE 2 | 5

TAK: THE GREAT JUJU CHALLENGE

THE CONTROLS ARE THE CHALLENGE

PUB. THQ DEV. Avalanche
ESRB E MSRP $39.99

Tribal boy Tak is back for a third round of platforming adventure. This time, you'll guide Tak and his buddy Lok through dangerous jungles, using their different abilities to solve puzzles as you slap the Juju out of evil critters. Occasionally, you'll fight it out with other tribes in a vehicle race or demolition derby. The numerous cinematic scenes are legitimately funny, even for grown-ups, but the floaty controls and terrible camera make the platforming more frustrating than it should be. | Chris Kohler

VERDICT For a kids' game, *Tak* is well above average—but that's not saying much.

SCORE 3 | 5

FROGGER: ANCIENT SHADOW

HARDLY RIBBET-ING

PUB. Konami DEV. Hudson Soft
ESRB E MSRP $29.99

Kids, I'm sorry. If your parents get you this for Christmas and say, "It's *Frogger*! Your dad and I played this when we were dating!" you have permission to run away from home. Konami's attempt to replicate the hop-from-square-to-square gameplay of the arcade classic just doesn't work—the confusing controls make something as simple as jumping on lily pads a chore. I'll say one thing for *Ancient Shadow*, though: It's less frustrating than this year's PSP effort. | Chris Kohler

VERDICT I still don't know why I have to press L and R to rotate a frog. Is he robotic or what?

SCORE 2.5 | 5

TY THE TASMANIAN TIGER 3

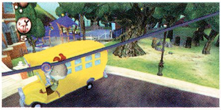
RATCHET FOR THE JUNIOR SET

PUB. Activision DEV. Krome Studios
ESRB E10+ MSRP $29.99

There's good news and bad news about the third *Ty* game. The bad news: Most of the game, from the general enemy-blasting feel to the specific weapon-switching interface, is taken straight from the *Ratchet & Clank* series. The good news: That's a pretty fine series to take from, and younger kids might get less frustrated with *Ty*'s more forgiving, mash-friendly gameplay. The humor isn't as sharp either, but then again, if it were, it'd be wasted on its intended audience. | Nich Maragos

PROS Fairly easy and forgiving; likable characters
CONS Feels a little sloppily put together

SCORE 3 | 5



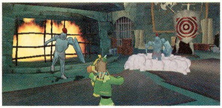
CHICKEN LITTLE
A BIG GOOSE EGG

PUB. Buena Vista Games DEV. G-Artists
ESRB E MSRP $39.99

While most games based on kids' movies are lazy and not well thought-out, *Chicken Little* doesn't even aim that high. In fact, this barely qualifies as a game. Cut-scenes are typically the bits that connect the meat of a game together, but here, it's shoddy minigames that are gluing all the film clips together—there's more movie in this game than there is game. And the film itself isn't worth watching. If this cost $20, it might be remotely tolerable, but a price tag of $40 makes it unforgivable. | *Dana Jongewaard*

VERDICT Buy any other game in this roundup instead.

SCORE 1.5 | 5



SCOOBY-DOO! UNMASKED
THOSE MEDDLING KIDS!

PUB. THQ DEV. A2M
ESRB E MSRP $29.99

The problem with a game squarely aimed at the Saturday-morning cartoon crowd is that it's easy to excuse a lack of content or challenge as simply catering to the younger demographic. *Scooby-Doo! Unmasked* is guilty of just that: The game is far too short and easy to be worth the asking price. While very young children may get a kick out of seeing Scoob hop around boring and repetitive levels, it's hard to justify a purchase when the whole thing only lasts three hours. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT Solid graphics and a great story don't make up for a lack of content. Would be a steal at bargain-bin prices, though.

SCORE 2 | 5

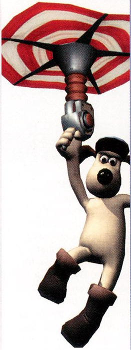
CRASH TAG TEAM RACING
TEEMING WITH TRIVIA

PUB. VU Games DEV. Radical
ESRB E10+ MSRP $39.99

Though you wouldn't know it by the title, *Crash Tag Team Racing* is about everything but racing. Much of your time is spent outside of cars, hopping and bopping around a theme park in the style (if not the substance) of Crash's day-job games. When you finally make it into a car, you're given all kinds of modes, though they're all variations on "go real fast" and "blow stuff up." For all the myriad options, *Tag Team Racing* fails to create a single compelling mode of play. It's a jack-of-all-trades and master of none. | *Robert Ashley*

VERDICT A shallow racer spread thinly over other game styles.

SCORE 2 | 5

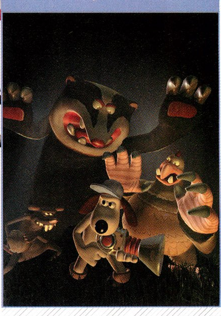


The filmmakers of *Wallace & Gromit* used 2.8 tons of plasticine on the characters, plus 1,000 baby wipes per week to get the residue off their fingers.

WALLACE & GROMIT
RELATIVELY GOOD

PUB. Konami DEV. Frontier Development
ESRB E MSRP $49.99

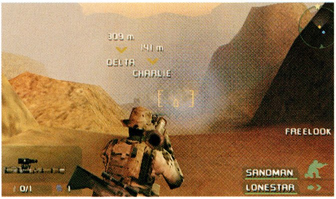
The film this game is based on is one of the most charming and original kid-appropriate movies to hit the screen in a long time, but while the game isn't bad, it's not nearly as good as its source material. The plot follows that of the film, and once you're beyond the very simplistic tutorial, a great deal of content is available, though the majority of it is based on rodent chasing. On the plus side, there's an always-available multiplayer option; on the minus side, the camera swings wildly at times and Wallace and Gromit are a bit pokey and clunky to maneuver. Also, some of the missions might be kind of tricky for young gamers to complete. Nevertheless, it goes further—and is better—than the average kid-movie game license. | *Dana Jongewaard*

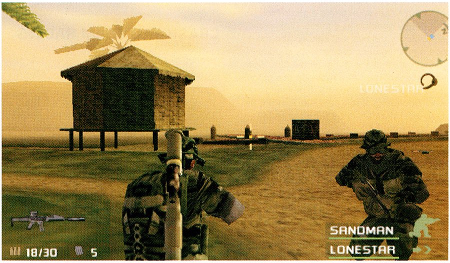


VERDICT A decent way for kids to kill some time, though be warned that they may be asking you for help.

SCORE 3 | 5

FIRETEAM BRAVO'S LEVELS ARE SURPRISINGLY DETAILED FOR A PSP GAME.





PUB. Sony CEA **DEV.** Zipper Interactive **ESRB** M **MSRP** $39.99

SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS FIRETEAM BRAVO

YOUR NEW AREA OF OPERATION: EVERYWHERE

When you think about a series that would work well on the PSP, *SOCOM* certainly isn't the first one that comes to mind. Since it requires exacting precision and methodical movement, moving it to a small-screen, single-analog format seems like a recipe for frustration. That's why it's such a relief to be able to say that *Fireteam Bravo* well and truly is a *SOCOM* game—and that it's a damn good one at that.

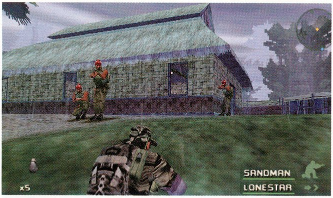
Understand, though, that while this certainly is a *SOCOM* game, it's at the outer reaches of the familiar *SOCOM* experience. The biggest change comes from the addition of a lock-on feature; it's an absolute must in the move to PSP, to be sure, but it also makes the game a much faster, less stealthy, more run-and-gun affair. However, it's not as big a shift as was feared, thanks to some very clever design ideas. See, you can lock on to any visible enemy within the range of your currently equipped weapon—but your aim will vary wildly based on a number of factors. Lie flat on the ground, unmoving, just a few feet away from your enemy, and you'll see your reticule move up to his head, setting the stage for a one-shot kill. But if you run around wildly or shoot from a distance, you'll have much less precise aim, and it'll take a hell of a lot longer to take him down—meaning you run a greater risk of your target ducking behind cover, which cancels your lock on.

Really, all things considered, this is pretty much the ideal setup for aiming in a game of this type on the PSP. I just wish some of the other controls made as much sense. Switching weapons, for example, is a chore, and almost impossible to do on the run. I like how some of the face buttons do double duty; for example, tapping Triangle switches stances, but holding it down switches between your primary weapon and grenades. I just wish the game included *some* options for customizing the control scheme; for instance, I hardly ever use grenades, but I'm constantly switching between my primary rifle and a shorter-range submachine gun (which *Fireteam Bravo* offers in place of a handgun). It would have been nice to be able to set up the Triangle button to switch between those two.

> FIRETEAM BRAVO WELL AND TRULY IS A SOCOM GAME—AND A DAMN GOOD ONE.

A 180-degree quick-turn option would not have been unwelcome, either; if you happen to overlook a terrorist hiding off in a side hatch somewhere, you need to turn around in a hurry. And here, you can't—so by the time you swing around to bring your weapon to bear, you've lost probably half your health.

But these complaints are the exceptions. For the most part, *Fireteam Bravo* is an impressive feat, bringing the methodical feel of single-player *SOCOM* to the PSP surprisingly well. Yes, for the majority of the game, the lock-on control makes things easier than you might expect from a game in this series, but the difficulty takes a substantial leap in the final act, which brings the pacing back to familiar levels.



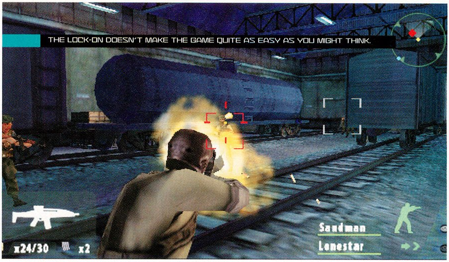
SANDMAN
LONESTAR
57/100
1

Sandman
Lonestar
x25/30
x2

PSP HEADSET

SAY WHAT?

By now you may have heard that *Fireteam Bravo* will be the launchpad for a brand-new Sony peripheral: the PSP headset. By incorporating a tiny boom mic into a pair of over-the-ear headphones, Sony has managed to complete the *SOCOM* experience on PSP. While noticeably less sturdy feeling than any PS2 headset (owing to the need to basically hang the earpieces on your ears—not the most comfortable setup), in our brief tryout it worked as well as you could hope—and this was over a notoriously interference-prone wireless network. The headset is available now for $19.99.



THE LOCK-ON DOESN'T MAKE THE GAME QUITE AS EASY AS YOU MIGHT THINK.

Of course, as in any *SOCOM* , the single-player campaign is only half the story. And I'm very, very pleased to report that *Fireteam Bravo* in no way skimps on the multiplayer options that have made the series famous. With support for up to 16 players, 12 all-new maps, and five game types, the multiplayer side of things is as well developed as any *SOCOM* fan could hope for. Most significant are the two new game types: In addition to standbys suppression, demolition, and extraction, *Fireteam Bravo* adds captive and free-for-all. Free-for-all is the every-man-for-himself deathmatch that fans have been hoping for, and with respawn enabled, it's a crazy, ridiculously fast-paced affair.

But it's captive that really steals the show here. Employing a sort of freeze-tag dynamic, this game allows players to revive fallen teammates just by standing near them and hitting a button. The result is an awesome seesaw battle that can be won only through teamwork and careful coordination. It's one of the best *SOCOM* game types in the series' history, and I'm praying it arrives in the next PS2 (or perhaps PS3?) sequel.

And the great thing is that all this portable multiplayer goodness can take place in person or over the Internet, since the game supports both ad hoc and infrastructure play. What's most surprising to me is that the infrastructure play works so smoothly. My longest online play session took place in an area where my PSP reported wireless signal strength of about 50 percent. And yet there was no noticeable lag—no connection issues at all, in fact. To me, that's a big deal.

Don't have access to the Internet or other PSP peeps? There's still more game for you to enjoy thanks to the instant action mode. Once you complete a mission, the map for that mission shows up in instant action mode, allowing you to play one of five quick-fix games set on that map: hostage extraction, stealth extraction, sweep and clear, sabotage, and stealth sabotage. These names are all fairly self-explanatory; what isn't so easy to get across is how much fun it is to play a totally no-pressure kind of mission in the *SOCOM* universe. With quick five-minutes-or-less challenges, instant action is really ideal for smoke breaks or short bus rides.

It's not much of a surprise that *Fireteam Bravo* is very much a portable *SOCOM*, with a similar presentation, feel, and depth. What's surprising is that it's so much more. With only a few exceptions, it exceeds every expectation. Bravo, indeed. | Joe Rybicki

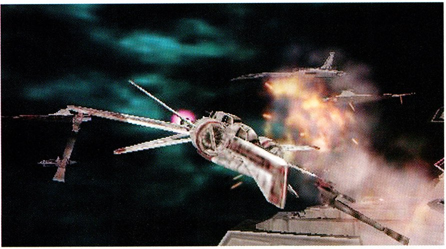
GET CONNECTED

Don't have a wireless network set up at home, school, or work? Head over to www.wifi-freespot.com to browse a nationwide database of free Wi-Fi hot spots.

ABLE Familiar *SOCOM* feel and depth, excellent multiplayer features

ZULU Occasional control issues, steep learning curve for controls

SCORE 4.5 | 5



ENTITY.ALL_CAP_REBELCRUISER2

IMPERIAL OFFICER
EMPIRE LOST THE TEMPLE

PUB. LucasArts **DEV.** Pandemic **ESRB** T **MSRP** $49.99

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II

IT'S A TRAP!

Star Wars Battlefront II for the PSP is simply the Death Star. It's an immensity that is chock-full of destructive power, symbolized by the multiple re-creations of the biggest and baddest battles in *Star Wars* history. Its seemingly flawless exterior is made up of snazzy graphics and authentic *pewpewpew* laser sound effects. Yet, for all that is good about it, like the original Death Star, it has one flaw that slipped through construction, a flaw that is significant enough to blow the entire thing apart. That flaw is the terrible framerate during multiplayer.

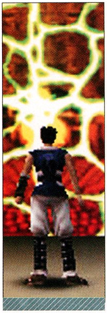
If you're into single player, the game is actually quite good. Despite the PSP having only one analog nub, the control interface (analog nub for movement, face buttons for aiming) is quite usable, with the aid of the target lock-on button. Galactic Conquest, Instant Action, and Challenges make for decent single-player gameplay variety. Challenges, a PSP exclusive, is an extra mode where you fulfill specific objectives like killing Ewoks, Gungans, or rogue baddies (such as rogue Imperial officers or rogue droids).

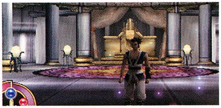
But honestly, this franchise thrives on multiplayer, and in that regard, the Force is quite weak. It can be somewhat forgiven that the game supports only up to four players in ad hoc mode. It can't be forgiven if those four players experience framerates in the single digits—framerates that make many ground maps slow and stuttery, and also make space battles nearly unplayable. It's not unusual to have such a choppy framerate in space that you think your X-wing or TIE fighter is quivering in just one spot. In multiple play sessions, there are, of course, exceptions (cooperative Rogue Assassin mode felt quite smooth), but in general, multiplayer ranges from extraordinarily annoying to downright unplayable. Again, while the PSP version of *Battlefront II* looks the look and talks the talk, it takes just one crippling flaw to tear the whole product apart and make what could have been a great portable *Star Wars* game into a merely decent PSP distraction. | Thierry Nguyen

EWOKS Pretty good transition from PS2 to PSP—when it comes to single player
GUNGANS Terrible framerate in multiplayer undermines the main reason you'd play it

SCORE 3|5

CHALLENGE THEE!
Here's how the three PSP-exclusive challenges work. In Rogue Assassin, you play a special-ops clone who's tasked with hunting down Imperial officers and crazy droids. Rebel Raider has you entering enemy territory, grabbing an object, and then taking it back to your base. Finally, Imperial Enforcer just has you hunt Jawas, Ewoks, and Gungans.





KINGDOM OF PARADISE

MORE LIKE KINGDOM OF COMBOS

PUB. Sony CEA **DEV.** Climax
ESRB T **MSRP** $39.99

The PSP is still early enough in its life span that it's lacking in some key areas—and *Kingdom of Paradise*, by dint of blending the gameplay styles of a brawler and an RPG, manages to help fill two slots nicely at the same time.

The game's beginning is brutal—if you try to beat the first story-related battle without leveling up a little, you'll be destroyed. From there, the game doesn't really let up in difficulty, though your character increasingly becomes stronger, both by learning new moves and powering up RPG style. This balances out to a nice, challenging game.

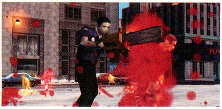
Combo-based martial arts attacks make up the core gameplay. At first, you have only one combo, but as you progress, you start to earn more. You'll even get "free scrolls" that let you design your own combos from an extensive pool of attacks. This is when the battles really begin to shine. With magical attacks for spice, the game's overall combat system is surprisingly robust and flexible. If anything's missing, it's a Block button. The autotargeting can also be a bit flaky. Neither of these even comes close to erasing the joy of unloading a custom combo on a horde of enemies, though.

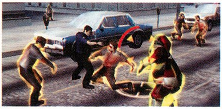
Graphically, the game stands out—its large areas are quite impressively realized for the PSP, and even with many enemies onscreen, the game rarely misses a step. The story, set in a fantasy realm based on ancient China, is dull but not offensively so. As it mainly mines kung fu movie clichés instead of RPG ones, it's at least marginally novel for the genre, if not engrossing. Gameplay counts most, though. If you like action-RPGs, *Kingdom of Paradise* will turn your head. | Christian Nutt

GAMEOGRAPHY
Kingdom of Paradise is the first game in several years from developer Climax, originators of the cult-classic Sega Genesis RPG *Landstalker*, which is still the company's crowning achievement. This Climax is not to be confused with the developer of *ATV* fame.

VERDICT This is an attractive, fun game, and if it had a better story and slightly more polish, it would be one of the best for the system.

SCORE 4|5





INFECTED

SURPRISINGLY INFECTIOUS

PUB. Majesco DEV. Planet Moon

ESRB M MSRP $39.99

Allow me to make a prediction: When you first fire up *Infected*, you're going to think it's one of the most juvenile, gratuitous, silly little pieces of blood-drenched action on any system. And that's pretty much what it is. But in spite of its goofy, vulgar, utterly over-the-top style...the game's damn addictive.

Third-person shooters tend to be somewhat complex, what with all the weapon switching and aiming and whatnot. *Infected* distills this formula down to a four-step process: 1) Lock on to zombies, 2) weaken zombies with ballistic weapons, 3) explode zombies with a viral weapon, and 4) repeat. The more zombies you kill, the better weapons you get, and the game automatically upgrades whatever you're holding. This is just one example of the streamlined simplicity of the game, and a good argument for why it's hard to put down.

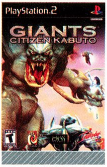
The nice thing is that even though it's simple as hell, *Infected* has enough variety so that it doesn't get too monotonous. By throwing in missions that require you to rescue civilians, the game really breaks up the trigger-happy, gore-oozing splatterfest.

Online and ad hoc play are similarly simple, but with one twist: When you win matches with "infection" enabled, the losers become infected with your character, which shows up in their single-player game. To rid themselves of the infection, they have to beat three special missions *or* pass the infection on to three people. This is a great idea for getting people involved in the game, especially considering that you can track the spread of your "virus" on a map in-game.

With bite-sized missions perfect for on-the-go play, *Infected*—though juvenile and simple and very, very M-rated—is a surprisingly good time. It's a guilty pleasure, but a pleasure nonetheless. | *Joe Rybicki*

VERDICT It'll grow on you like an ugly rash.

SCORE 4 | 5

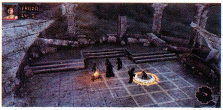


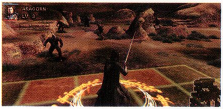
GAMEOGRAPHY

Infected developer Planet Moon is the studio behind the oddball sleeper hits *Armed and Dangerous* and *Giants: Citizen Kabuto*.

LORD OF THE NETWORK

While the core game might solicit a shrug, *LOTR: Tactics*' multiplayer mode is the one feature to rule them all. It's a pretty seamless ad hoc connection for up to four players, and it works. RPGs are very much like chess, so there's plenty of replayability to be found.





THE LORD OF THE RINGS: TACTICS

HEY FRODO, WHAT'S THE RUSH?

PUB. EA Games DEV. EA Games

ESRB T MSRP $39.99

I played ***Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*** twice, for a total of about 185 hours. I carried that game around like it was a family heirloom, and it became clear to me that the tactical RPG is the ideal game for handhelds. With relatively short battles, loads of attacks and spells, and detailed team management, the genre fits do-it-anywhere gaming better than any other. So, here comes *The Lord of the Rings: Tactics*: The world of Middle-earth forms a rich foundation for an RPG, especially a tactical one; this one couldn't miss.

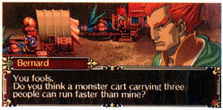
And it didn't—but it didn't quite hit a bull's-eye either. *LOTR: Tactics* seems like it was designed via checklist, with the requisite team management, fun attacks, spells, and varied missions. It's all quite serviceable, but utterly uninspired. It's also short; I was prepared to cart my PSP everywhere for the next few months and was surprised to find myself finishing the initial campaign in about 13 hours—with three of those hours spent on the last mission.

When *LOTR: Tactics* is good, it can be really good. Since it includes characters and a world everyone knows and loves—all presented in that familiar *FF Tactics* style—at times you'll find the game so engaging that you won't want it to end. Other times, though, it seems almost like a rush job, with dark palettes seemingly cribbed from *The Third Age*. And despite EA having won the license to the *LOTR* books as well, the game overwhelmingly relies on the Peter Jackson retelling, with the obligatory film footage.

Which is too bad; Tolkien's legendary epic offers an embarrassment of character and world riches. Let's just hope *LOTR: Tactics* is just a proof of concept and that EA is already working on the real thing. | *Tom Byron*

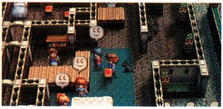
VERDICT A by-the-book tactical RPG that takes no chances but can be engaging. It's also short, with campaigns under 15 hours.

SCORE 3 | 5



Bernard

You fools.
Do you think a monster cart carrying three people can run faster than mine?



THE LEGEND OF HEROES: A TEAR OF VERMILLION

SUBTRACT 10 FROM YOUR AGE

PUB. Bandai DEV. Bandai/Falcom

ESRB T MSRP $39.99

Most people are happier with RPGs the way they are now. Everyone knows it took *Final Fantasy VII* to kick the genre into high gear. But those of us who played 'em before they got big—on the SNES—have beautiful memories of how they used to be.

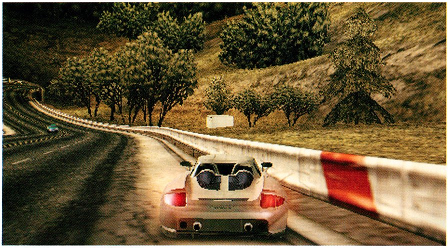
Nostalgia can be a bitch, though, because sometimes, older things only *seem* better. *The Legend of Heroes* seems designed specifically to test this theory. It's a remake of a 10-year-old PC game that never came to the United States, and it feels almost like time stopped—the game bears an oddly compelling resemblance to *Lunar*, despite actually having nothing to do with it.

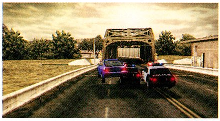
Everything you might remember from classic RPGs is here: Anime-styled lads, raised in a small village and stout of heart, embark on an adventure to thwart the machinations of an unambiguously evil man by rescuing a beautiful girl. The battles are as turn-based as turn-based gets. The game forces you to farm gold and spend time leveling up to make it through dungeon after dungeon. The dialogue is, obviously, awkwardly translated from Japanese.

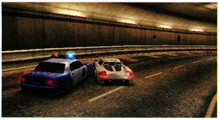
Does that sound good to you? It probably depends on how old you are and what kind of games you used to like to play. Even if you're not a fan of the old style, though, you still might find something to like here: The visuals are crisp and detailed, making the PSP's screen shine with bright and inviting locales. The story is cute enough to compel attention, and the battles aren't an absolute bore. *The Legend of Heroes* is a charming, enjoyable game, and though it has the faint odor of grandma's attic, it still kept me happily tapping the X button. | *Christian Nutt*

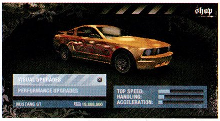
VERDICT This game really rolls back the clock, but it also makes an excellent time waster, and its up-to-date visuals help take the edge off. A solid adventure.

SCORE 3.5 | 5









PUB. EA Games DEV. EA Canada ESRB E10+ MSRP $49.99

NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED 5-1-0

TIME FOR SOME NEW WHEELS

The problem with a sequel coming out less than nine months after the original game is that it's almost guaranteed to be unimpressive unless it features a massive overhaul. And as we all know, massive overhaul is not how you'd normally describe any sort of sequel from Electronic Arts.

Not that this is necessarily a bad thing. After all, if it ain't broke, why fix it? It's just that EA's tried, true, and conservative approach to sequels backfires a bit with *Most Wanted*, which can be most generously described as a "director's cut" of sorts for *Underground Rivals*.

Most Wanted plays out almost exactly like *Rivals*—start off with a ride your mom wouldn't feel cool in (in this case, a stock Chevy Cobalt) and trick it out with performance upgrades and body kits, taking it up against local street racers in an attempt to earn cash and cred. With said cash, you can buy better upgrades, win new cars, rinse, repeat.

And it looks and plays almost *exactly* the same as the prequel we all paid good money for such a short time ago. Any visual upgrades will be all but lost on any but the hardest of hardcore *NFS* fans. In fact, any upgrades at all fall into that category.

I will give credit where it's due, though: EA incorporated the hot-pursuit aspect nicely here. Making the police chases a sort of double-or-nothing bonus event following certain races adds a bit of excitement to a formula that's rapidly growing tired. It's also nice that pursuit mode is a separate selectable option.

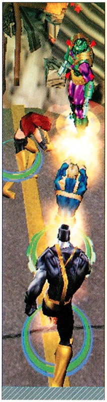
But at the end of the day, unless you're jonesing for a few new cars to add to your virtual garage, you're simply paying for more of the same with *Need for Speed: Most Wanted*. And with something as spectacular as *Burnout Legends* gracing Sony's handheld, what was acceptable nine months ago is pretty hard to justify spending my hard-earned cash on today. It's pretty ironic that Electronic Arts publishes both games. | *Greg Sewart*

5-1-0

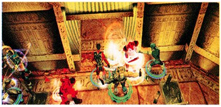
In case you're wondering, 5-1-0 is the police code for illegal street racing.

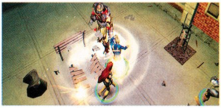
VERDICT What's basically an upgraded *Rivals* doesn't stand up to recent racers like *Burnout Legends*.

SCORE 3 | 5



The ability to create a hybrid team consisting of both X-Men and members of the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants is one of *Rise of Apocalypse's* strongest points.





X-MEN LEGENDS II: RISE OF APOCALYPSE

ALREADY THE PSP HAS A "BEST SUPERHERO GAME EVER"

PUB. Activision DEV. Vicarious Visions
ESRB T MSRP $49.99

With the exception of the obvious control differences—and some bonus characters—*X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse* for the PSP is exactly the same as the PS2 version. And if you read my review of that game last issue, you know how much I liked it. Despite having to play it again—or maybe because of it—I liked the PSP version better. I take the bus to and from work every day, and *XML2* fit right in.

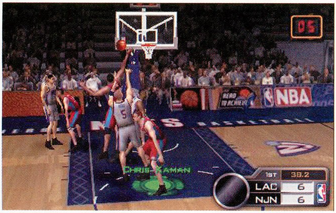
XML2's brand of play is a good match for most PSP gamers. It's a lot like *Untold Legends*: a three-quarters top-down-view sort of game in which you go from section to section fighting foes. In the case of *XML2*, you're doing this with Marvel Comics' band of mutant superheroes known as the X-Men—and now the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants as well.

XML2 brings these traditional enemies together in an epic quest to stop Apocalypse from taking over the world. The story and colorful cel-shaded graphics are top-notch, but *XML2* absolutely shines when it comes to team management, as you can build your four-hero gang from up to 16 characters. (Trying different combos can result in some interesting teams, like the all-woman femme fatale group of Storm, Jean Grey, Rogue, and the Scarlet Witch.)

The missions themselves follow a formula that can get a bit dull: Go in a room, fight enemies, go to the next room, fight enemies, and so on. With one exception, the boss battles are surprisingly easy once you figure out their pattern (which will take most of you about 30 seconds); that exception is the inventive final boss battle, which stands as one of my all-time favorites.

VERDICT This is exactly the kind of game the PSP needs.

SCORE 4.5 | 5



PUB. Sony CEA DEV. 989 Sports ESRB E MSRP $39.99

NBA 06

GOOD FOR THE DRIVE

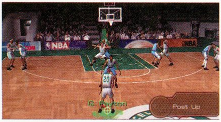
If there's one thing that *NBA 06* is suited for, it's on-the-go gameplay. The fast-paced nature of the game—almost to the point that it's an arcade-style basketball game—works very well if you want just a few quick bursts of NBA action here and there. While you don't have to worry about the overly technical details of basketball, there are still some features in here to keep you honest. Passing has to be done with some care since computer and human opponents are pretty adept at picking the ball out of passing lanes. The shooting mechanics aren't completely out of control either; you still need to have somewhat precise timing to make a crisp, clean shot, though the window for a proper jump shot does seem to be pretty wide open.

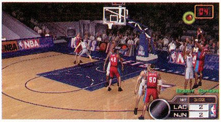
Relatively speaking, just about everything else in *NBA 06* is equally bare-bones, particularly the season mode, but there are a number of minigames to help keep you busy on those especially long trips. Most of the minigames are pretty standard, including the three-point contest and Horse competition. Others—like Own the Court, Skills Challenge (where passing, shooting, and dribbling skills are put to the test), and Dodgeball—are significantly more interesting. They'd be even more fun if the controls were just a little bit tighter, but sadly, some of the canned shooting animation really brings the whole experience down.

But again, *NBA 06* is good for a few little bursts, even if it's not the pinnacle of basketball simulations, and also makes for some fun multiplayer. | *Giancarlo Varanini*

PROS Fast gameplay great for a handheld, looks good, fun minigames
CONS Game skimps a little too much on the features it has, controls still need some work

SCORE 3.5 | 5





INSTANT FAME
The presentation elements in *NBA 06* for the PSP are pretty weak, but there are some cool moments, like when your player gets instantly put onto a basketball card if he makes a cool shot or move.

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Page 44 Studios ESRB E10+ MSRP $39.99

GRETZKY NHL 06

THE GREAT ONE PICKS UP STEAM

As various sports-game publishers scramble to get back on their regular schedules, we're rewarded with what should be yearly updates to PSP launch games before the bad taste from the first round of titles has even had time to go away.

This second portable outing for *Gretzky* has improved, to be sure. The game doesn't move quite so erratically this time around, and you can actually set up plays thanks to the icon passing feature. It's still pretty hard to keep track of the puck on the relatively small PSP screen, though, and the goalies continue to give up rebounds that look as though they were fired from a cannon.

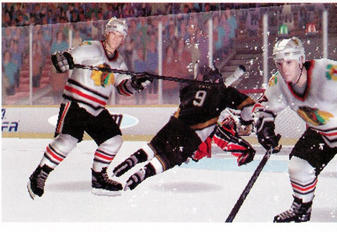
However, the basic play mechanics aren't horrible. *Gretzky* isn't an upper-tier hockey simulator by any stretch of the imagination, but it's still a decent time. And taking the action online works better than it did the last time around, too, though I had trouble finding a lot of other players out there.

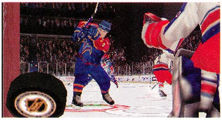
The strange omissions are what hurt *Gretzky NHL 06* the most. While you're able to play a full season in *NHL 06* on PS2, no campaign mode is offered here. And the rosters sport some pretty big holes—you won't find rookies like Crosby or Ovechkin—and for some reason the game lacks an online roster-update option. Actually, online play is limited in general, since you can't run every game type during a Wi-Fi session.

The Great One's game has definitely gotten better in these last few months, but it still has a long way to go before it can compete with the likes of EA's or 2K's NHL offerings. Unfortunately, *Gretzky* is the only hockey game you'll find on your PSP this season. It's time for another lockout. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT A definite improvement over the first PSP *Gretzky*, but *Gretzky NHL 06* still fails to thrill.

SCORE 2.5 | 5





GREAT INDEED
Wayne Gretzky became the fastest NHL player to reach 1,000 points on December 19, 1994. He accomplished this feat in just 424 games.

[Nathan Fillion, Gina Torres]

SERENITY

A SCI-FI FLICK WITH REAL WRITING? PREPOSTEROUS!

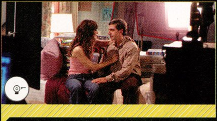
by John Scalzi

As many of you know, when I'm not dorking out with you guys here, I write science-fiction novels, and thus I have a green card for the nation of science-fiction fandom. In this nation, the love for writer/director Joss Whedon is a mighty river; one of the reasons is his sci-fi TV series *Firefly,* about a bunch of malcontents flying around in a crappy spaceship. The series flopped, but the DVD collection did immense business. So they released a movie. It flopped. Want to guess how the DVD is going to do? Given the fact that Universal is putting out the DVD less than three months after the movie came out, you can guess they think it's going to do just fine. Welcome to the new math of Hollywood.

Make no mistake: It would have been better for this film if it had been a hit in the cineplex, because the movie is one of the better-written pieces of science fiction to pop out of Hollywood, certainly better than the drecklicious *Star Wars* films. It has characters to care about, starting with the captain of the crappy spaceship, a fellow named Mal (Nathan Fillion) who fought on the losing side of a war but whose personal sense of right and wrong came out of the experience just fine. When a weird teen with weirder powers takes passage aboard his ship, Mal risks it and his crew trying to keep her safe from those hunting her. In what happens next, snappy dialogue and personal relationships are at least as important as the action and pretty effects. I can think of worse things than having more sci-fi films like this.

Ironically, the thing that would have made *Serenity* a hit in theaters was the thing it didn't have: time. *Serenity* could have benefited from a little more distance from its founding series to let people outside the hardcore fans get a look at what they're missing. Mind you, the hardcore fans are the people who are going to push this movie into the black on DVD. But ultimately, you need more than just the hardcore.

SCORE 4 | 5

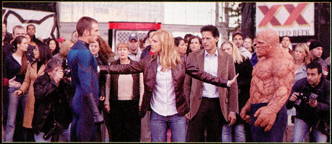


THE 40-YEAR-OLD VIRGIN

[Steve Carell, Catherine Keener]

Steve Carell plays the virgin in question, a man who has sublimated his sexual urges into "collectibles," which should prompt every geek who reads this magazine to say, "There but for the grace of God go I." This flick looks like it should be crass and a little gross, and well, it is (the waxing scene is an instant classic), but it's also surprisingly sweet and smart—an actual date flick, and that's real irony, considering the subject matter.

SCORE 4|5



FANTASTIC 4

[Ioan Gruffudd, Jessica Alba]

Like most heterosexual men, I'm willing to tolerate a lot to watch Jessica Alba walk around, although this should not be taken to mean I'm ready to watch *Honey* a second time. Or, for that matter, *Fantastic 4*, which is the sort of superhero film you get when you have superheroes no one actually cares about, and that "no one" includes the people who wrote, directed, and starred in the thing. It's like a government-issued superhero movie.

Origin story: Folks go up in space and get hit by cosmic rays. Four become superheroes and one becomes a supervillain. One of the heroic four is Alba, who can turn invisible, which is not to the advantage of the movie, since no one else is worth looking at. A bunch of special effects, some flabby acting, and lots of room for sequels follow. You've already seen this done, and better.

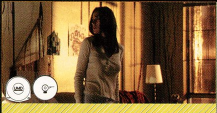
SCORE 2.5|5

THE BROTHERS GRIMM

[Matt Damon, Heath Ledger]

This is a Terry Gilliam film, which means it looks unbelievably great, and best of luck to you in trying to figure out exactly what's going on—it seems that the brothers Grimm (you know, the guys who wrote those fairy tales) are sort of 19th-century ghostbusters who battle a 500-year-old wicked witch (Monica Bellucci, yow). But really, who can say? By this time you should know that you don't come to Gilliam for deep thoughts.

SCORE 3.5|5



DARK WATER

[Jennifer Connelly, Dougray Scott]

Yet another remake of a Japanese horror film, with all the standard trimmings: moisture, nameless dread, and children in danger or causing danger. Part of me likes that these imports are more stylish and better produced than your average horror fodder, but another part of me is really bored with the formula. You want to impress me with your Japanese horror remake? Fine. Remake *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*. And good luck making that PG-13.

SCORE 3|5

GODZILLA: FINAL WARS

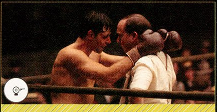
[Godzilla, other rubbery monsters]

Alas, is this the end of Godzilla? According to Toho Co., which is the place all *Godzilla* movies come from (except that one with Matthew Broderick, and let us never speak of it again), it is. This send-off features the majority of the monsters in the *Godzilla* universe stomping the hell out of various cities and Godzilla battling the lot of them. Dumb like all *Godzilla* movies, but fun in a videogame sense—which makes it perfect to watch on a PSP.

SCORE 2.5|5

DVD RELEASE

December 6
Cinderella Man
Dukes of Hazzard
Fantastic 4
December 13
The 40-Year-Old Virgin
Godzilla: Final Wars
The Island
December 20
The Brothers Grimm
Serenity
December 27
Dark Water

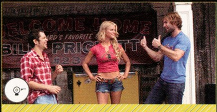


CINDERELLA MAN

[Russell Crowe, Renée Zellweger]

Call it *A Beautiful Fist*: Russell Crowe and director Ron Howard reteam to tell another true-to-life tale, this one about prizefighter Jim Braddock, whose rags to riches to rags to riches story makes for some great Oscar bait. The good news here is that the film is actually very good; Crowe's one of the best screen actors of his generation, and Zellweger, who plays his wife, is good too. The fight scenes will make you cheer. Check it out.

SCORE 4.5|5



THE DUKES OF HAZZARD

[Johnny Knoxville, Seann William Scott]

Take your right hand. Jam it into a garbage disposal and hit the switch. Now take your left hand, wrap it in bacon, and feed it to a starving grizzly. Roast your left foot in a hibachi while Richard Simmons tongue-bathes your right foot. Soak your genitals in a solution of lye and piranhas. Guess what? You're still having more fun than you would if you watched this flick. And no, ogling Jessica Simpson in her Daisy Dukes does not make it any better.

SCORE 1|5

THE ISLAND

[Ewan McGregor, Scarlett Johansson]

Witness the Great Michael Bay Karma Correction of 2005, in which the director of loud, noisy, craptacular explode-o-fests was handed his very first flop. Ironically, this futuristic clones-on-the-run adventure is one of Bay's better outings, which is to say that it doesn't make you feel like you've swallowed a bottle of stupid pills—rather, just a half a bottle, and then maybe you vomited them back up. Yeah, that's entertainment, Michael Bay style.

SCORE 3|5

UMD RELEASE

December 6
Fantastic 4
December 13
Bad News Bears (2005)
Sky High
December 20
Batman Begins
The Brothers Grimm
Constantine
The Dukes of Hazzard
House of Wax
The Matrix
December 27
Dark Water
The Incredibles

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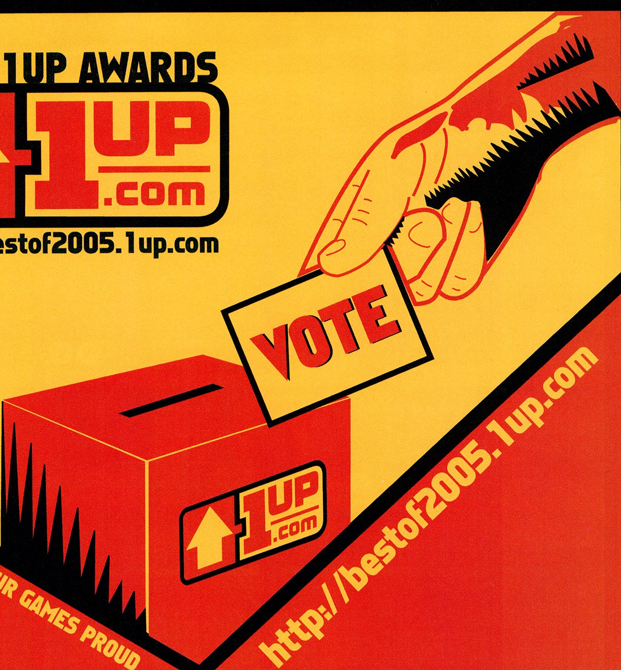

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Voting ends 12/31/05. Winners will be announced in January 2006

GAME GROUP

YOU HAVE A VOICE USE IT!

REPLAY

REVVING UP THE PLAYSTATION WAYBACK MACHINE

112

MUST-PLAY!

THE 100 MOST ESSENTIAL PS1, PS2, AND PSP GAMES

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EIC AGAIN

TOM, JOE, JOHN, WAT, AND KRAIG REMINISCE

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Coolest giveaway ever, but ya gotta play to win.

100

PLAYSTATION 1, PLAYSTATION 2, AND PSP GAMES YOU MUST PLAY BEFORE YOU DIE

What should games do? Should they entertain? Should they challenge? Should they inspire? Should they affect us in ways we never thought possible? When we at *OPM* first discussed our Essential 100 list, we consciously avoided "best of," "editors' choice," or any myriad cliché countdowns and rankings. What we knew was that we needed a list that would encompass all the most important games in PlayStation history: the games that made the difference, the ones that launched franchises, and the ones that were simply fun to play.

We couldn't go it alone. We asked the top PlayStation game designers, producers, and members of the press to submit their picks, and we've included what they had to say within these pages.

No list is ever perfect. But perfection was never our goal. In the end, we hope this list is one that, if you were to play all the games in it (and you conceivably can since many are still available at retail or on eBay), will make you a supremely well-rounded gamer. Maybe you'll find, as we have, that games have the power to entertain, challenge, inspire, and affect you in ways you never thought possible. Have fun.

SPECIAL THANKS

We'd like to extend a very special thank you to the following folks who helped us pull this list together:

Shivam Bhatt
Steve Chiang
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David Jaffe
Jason Jones
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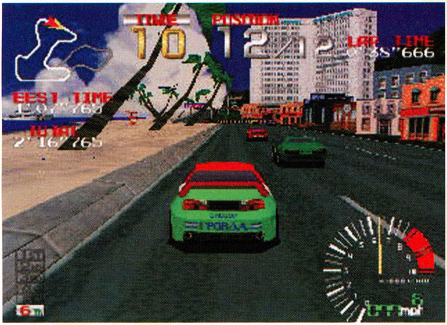
Peter Molyneux
Ryan Scott
Jeremy Strauser
Fumito Ueda
Alex Ward
Evan Wells
Neil Young

1995

THE BEGINNING OF EVERYTHING

The first year of the original PlayStation saw the launch of some series that are still around—and still great—10 years later.



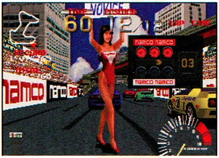
RIDGE RACER

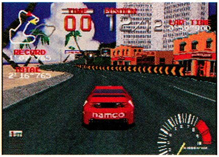
RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME

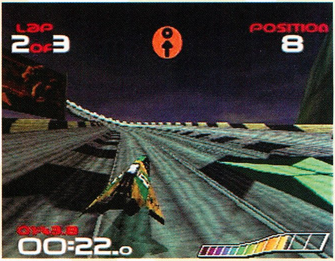
PUB. Namco DEV. Namco OPM SCORE N/A

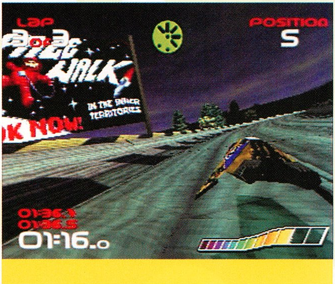
Back in an era when arcades still had relevance to gaming, *Ridge Racer* and other games like it ruled the roost. But no game served as a better—albeit early—demonstration of the original PlayStation's power than a respectable port of Namco's very popular arcade racing game. The fact that the arcade version looked better than anything we'd seen before (except maybe *Daytona USA* from Sega) made it seem like a home console version of the game simply couldn't be done. "[*Ridge Racer* was] the first thing I ever saw running on the [PlayStation]," says Alex Ward, creative director at Criterion (the *Burnout* series, *Black*). "My friends still chide me, as I told them all at the time, 'Nothing will beat this ever, it's virtual reality!' Hmm, not easy to live with."

The game's extra features showed Namco's dedication to the console market—some of which were way ahead of their time, such as the alternate soundtrack feature that lets you put an audio CD into the PlayStation after the game loads so you can listen to your own music while zipping around the track. This cool feature, however, is matched by the fact that you can play *Galaga* while the game loads—and if you're at all familiar with the load times of early PlayStation games, you know this is a great feature.









WIPEOUT

FUTURISTIC 3D RACER WAS AHEAD OF ITS TIME

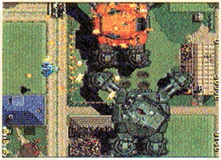
PUB. Psygnosis DEV. Psygnosis OPM SCORE

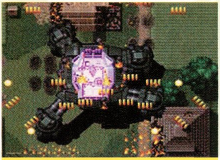
"Ten years from now, when most other games have been long forgotten, *Wipeout* will be viewed as a classic." These words were said in November 1995 in a website review of the game and, well, look where we are. *Wipeout* is a futuristic racing game in which you pilot speedy hovercraft on tracks that loop and swirl through huge 3D environments. The fun combat and techno soundtrack are just icing on the cake for thrill-seeking race fans. *Wipeout* remains popular, with several excellent follow-ups, including *Wipeout Pure* for the PSP.

1996

QUALITY WINS OVER QUANTITY

The PlayStation's first full year doesn't net a huge amount of classics (in fact, it's the smallest year of this list), but it brings us some great games.





RAIDEN PROJECT

THE ULTIMATE VERTICAL SHOOTER

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Seibu Kaihatsu OPM SCORE N/A

Capcom's Atsushi Inaba (*Viewtiful Joe, Okami*) considers *Raiden Project* the "ultimate vertical shooter." Strong praise 10 years after the game's release; after all, the more recent *Radiant Silvergun* and *Mars Matrix* have set the genre's bar incredibly high. But don't be put off by the vintage graphics or comparatively sedate gameplay: *Raiden Project* contains a pair of classics that set a new standard for arcade-to-home conversions and helped spark the retro-compilation trend. *Raiden Project* still challenges the ol' twitch reflexes.

11:52
0003600
Look
Shot
Jump
Special

JUMPING FLASH!

LEAPING TALL BUILDINGS

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Exact OPM SCORE N/A

Most people would probably claim that *Super Mario 64* was the first 3D platformer—those people would be wrong. Though it features a first-person perspective, *Jumping Flash* is a 3D platformer in every sense of the phrase, and it's a good one, too. It charges you with taking control of a mechanical rabbit capable of making huge leaps from platform to platform. *Jumping Flash!* is a top pick for Bungie's Jason Jones (*Halo, Halo 2*), who says, "By the time you're practically jumping into the atmosphere, the feeling of vertigo gives way to a feeling of elation."

Enemies: 4
MR SLAM
Lives: 0
TURBO
SPECIAL

TWISTED METAL 2

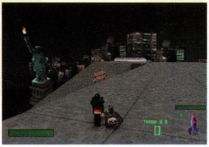
WWF RACING

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. SingleTrac OPM SCORE N/A

Sony's David Jaffe (*God of War*) didn't shy away from including his own creations on his list. He notes that *Twisted Metal 2* (which was done while he worked at development studio SingleTrac) features "some of the best multiplayer I've ever experienced." We'll add to that by noting that *Twisted Metal 2*, follow-up to the legendary car-combat donnybrook, was a groundbreaker in many ways. With drivers like Mr. Grimm (motorcycle), Warthog (army tank), Sweet Tooth (ice cream truck), and newcomers Grasshopper (dune buggy) and Mr. Slamm (backhoe), *Twisted Metal 2* sends you into massive arenas where you smash, bash, and thrash your way to last-man-standing victory. *Computer Gaming World*'s Ryan Scott calls *Twisted Metal 2* "the best car-combat [game] since *Super Mario Kart*. It's a game that started something big."

Big is right. *Twisted Metal* spawned several sequels and spin-offs, including 2001's superb *Twisted Metal: Black*, the kid-targeted *Twisted Metal: Small Brawl*, and most recently, the not-so-superb *Twisted Metal: Head-On* for the PSP.

> "SOME OF THE BEST MULTIPLAYER I'VE EVER EXPERIENCED."



SUPER PUZZLE FIGHTER II TURBO

A PUZZLING ADDICTION

PUB. Capcom
DEV. Capcom
OPM SCORE N/A

What happens when you combine two genres—fighting and puzzle—that normally have absolutely nothing to do with each other? You get *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*, a combination of *Tetris* and *Columns* with some *Street Fighter* thrown in. It's one of the most addictive games we've played, and still one of the best puzzle games to date. David Jaffe (*God of War*) gives *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo* especially high praise: "[It's the] only game my wife will play, so you KNOW it's good!"

BLOOD OMEN: LEGACY OF KAIN

THE PLAYSTATION GOES DARK

PUB. Crystal Dynamics
DEV. Silicon Knights
OPM SCORE N/A

Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain may have been Sony's attempt at a *Legend of Zelda*–style game with darker overtones, but we know and love it as a snazzy top-down action-adventure RPG in which you play as a pissed-off vampire. This is the game that introduced the awesome mechanic of sucking the blood of townsfolk for health and the character Kain (basically a fusion of Hannibal Lecter and Vlad the Impaler), who would later become the anchor for the *Legacy of Kain* franchise from Eidos.

1997

THE GREATEST YEAR OF ALL

In its second year, the PlayStation gets its groove on and busts out with some of its most memorable titles of all time. There are some who wish every year were 1997.

FINAL FANTASY VII

THE DEATH HEARD AROUND THE PLAYSTATION WORLD

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Squaresoft OPM SCORE 5

Boy-nerds were shocked and girl-nerds cried at one specific moment in *Final Fantasy VII*, a moment that turned out to be pivotal not just within the game, but within the entire game industry. *FFVII* snared gamers with its lavish production values and accessible gameplay that lets total RPG newbies get into the game. Evan Wells, copresident of Naughty Dog, comments, "*FFVII* was the first mega-RPG to find success in every territory. It stunned the world with gorgeously rendered cut-scenes and over-the-top spells that took RPGs to the next level." Insomniac CEO Ted Price elaborates, "It's always been hard for me to keep track of which *Final Fantasy* is which. Except for one. *FFVII* stood head and shoulders above any others in the series."

> "EVERY ROMANTIC OUT THERE SHOULD HAVE THIS ON THEIR SHELF."

Besides the grandness of the overall game, there was one extra element that sealed *FFVII*'s place in history: the emotional story. While RPGs have had elaborate plots before, none connected with gamers as much as *FFVII*'s, especially its momentous death scene. *OPM* columnist Zoe Flower waxes on about *FFVII*: "Pass the tissues, please. I can't even write about this without getting emotional.... No game has ever made me feel so very shaken up from a story line as *Final Fantasy VII*. Nobody warned me that I might possibly become extremely attached to my little party, and nobody warned me that somebody might actually die in a videogame and that it would matter. Well, someone did die and it does matter. It still matters. I'm still very sad. Videogames can deal with deeper topics like love and loss. Every romantic out there should have this on their shelf. And also anyone who likes spiky hair and big swords."

NAME
BARRIER
HP
MP
LIMIT
TIME
Cloud
264/ 320
54
Barret
327/ 327
43

BUSHIDO BLADE

THE MOST REALISTIC FIGHTING GAME EVER

PUB. Sony CEA
DEV. Squaresoft
OPM SCORE N/A

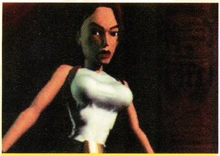
We've seen plenty of fighters come and go over the years, but few have been as unusual and realistic as *Bushido Blade*. It throws the arcade fighting-game formula out the window, creating a weapon-based fighter in which your first strike can be your last. Scoring a direct hit on an enemy's vitals can end a match in seconds, but if you merely hit your opponent's leg, you get to watch him hobble around for the rest of the fight. Bungie's Jason Jones agrees: "It's still the most realistic fighting game ever made. Turns out that being hit in the face with a razor-sharp samurai sword can be deadly."

RAGE RACER

THE ONE TO BEAT

PUB. Namco
DEV. Namco
OPM SCORE N/A

It may not be as well known as Namco's *Ridge Racer* games, but *Rage Racer* is one of Namco's best arcade racing games, and it's probably one of the best ports of an arcade game Namco has ever done, considering how much more complex it is than the original *Ridge Racer*. Nearly all of the excellent track details and designs from the arcade game made it into the home version, along with some cool new extra modes, such as a decal edit mode. It also adds some depth to the *Ridge Racer* formula by offering tuning options for your car.

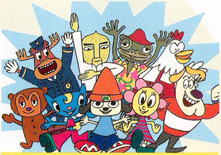


TOMB RAIDER II

LARA CROFT BROKE GROUND... AND OUR HEARTS

PUB. Eidos DEV. Core Interactive OPM SCORE 5

She was unlike anyone ever seen before in gaming. Strong, savvy, and sexy, the pistol-packin', dinosaur-killin' adventurer Lara Croft stormed onto the PlayStation in an action-packed third-person platformer that made everyone forget Indiana Jones. Lara reached the level of icon, appearing on the covers of *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Entertainment Weekly*, catching the eye of rockers U2, and spawning two feature films starring Oscar winner Angelina Jolie. *Tomb Raider* was a top pick for Lionhead Studios' Peter Molyneux (*Black & White*, *Fable*), who praises the game's groundbreaking character design: "The iconic nature of Lara Croft meant that for the first time, we could play games with a believable heroine rather than cute, nonhuman characters." Naughty Dog's Evan Wells adds, "Lara Croft is the only videogame character to have achieved international-cultural-icon status...[she] helped elevate gaming out of being a geeky pursuit." *OPM* columnist Zoe Flower brings a more personal reflection: "It was the first experience of playing an empowered and sexy action heroine who I was proud to accompany on many gun-wielding archeological adventures." While the original *Tomb Raider* introduced the world to Lara, we think *Tomb Raider II* is the series' best.



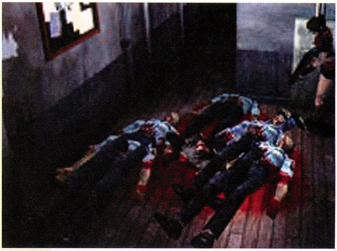
PARAPPA THE RAPPER

THE HIP-HOP ODDITY THAT CHANGED GAMING FOREVER

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Nana On-Sha OPM SCORE 5

"I gotta believe!" The battle cry of *PaRappa*'s hapless title character won us over instantly upon first seeing this utterly bizarre game, a mash-up of hip-hop, children's storybooks, and the electronic game Simon. A collaborative effort between New York artist Rodney Greenblat and Japanese musician Masaya Matsuura, *PaRappa* is a unique game. Its surreal characters (e.g., Chop Chop Master Onion, a karate instructor with an onion head) resemble paper cutouts, but they move freely in a 3D world. Its music features lyrics about baking cakes and selling trash, but the melodies become instantly and indelibly imprinted in your cortex. And the gameplay, though just a simple timing affair, turns out to be surprisingly addictive.

More importantly, though, *PaRappa* showed that the PS1 was the platform of experimentation and innovation. Don't believe us? Read what Capcom's Atsushi Inaba, designer of *Viewtiful Joe* and *Okami*, tells us: "This game created a brand-new genre and breathed new life into the world of videogames. The appeal has stood the test of time, even to this day." Games like *Rez* and *Katamari Damacy* (not to mention just about anything worth owning on the Nintendo DS) owe their very existence to *PaRappa*'s oddball example. Believe it.



RESIDENT EVIL 2

SURVIVAL-HORROR PERFECTED

PUB. Capcom DEV. Capcom OPM SCORE 5

While *Resident Evil* has grown by leaps and bounds with the release of the fourth game in the series, the older titles still have significance. For one thing, the very first *Resident Evil* pretty much defined the formula that would make up the survival-horror genre, in so much that any game bearing a resemblance would be judged against Capcom's scary zombie adventure. But if anything, *Resident Evil 2* perfects that original formula, making it the must-play game of the older *Resident Evil* titles. It expanded upon the two-character concept introduced in the first game by letting you take control of Claire Redfield or Leon S. Kennedy, each with his or her own story line and branching paths. The story was so well done and the two adventures felt different enough that as soon as you completed one, you wanted to jump right into the other. Alex Ward, creative director at Criterion (the *Burnout* series), shares his experience with *RE2*: "I started playing this at 10 a.m. one Saturday morning. With curtains drawn and sound turned up, I finished it at 7 a.m. Sunday morning. I had no idea what time it was. I paused only for tea and chocolate biscuits."

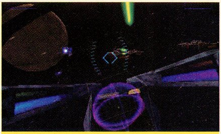
CHALLENGER
WIN : 5
SIEGFRIED
SOPHITIA

SOUL BLADE

THE FIRST STAGE OF HISTORY

PUB. Namco DEV. Namco OPM SCORE N/A

Soul Blade is not just the first truly great 3D weapons-based fighter (sorry, *Toshinden*), it's still a great fighting game, period. Plus, *Soul Blade* had one of the most amazing CG intros for the time and also laid the foundation for the *Soul Calibur* games with its excellent mechanics and in-depth modes, including Weapon Master, which would spawn similar modes in *Soul Calibur II* and *III*. It's worth noting that *Soul Blade* also has one very cool feature that the *Soul Calibur* games are lacking: the ability to break weapons and fight with your fists.

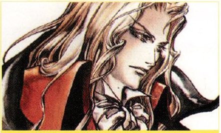


COLONY WARS

AN EPIC SPACE-COMBAT ACTIONFEST

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Psygnosis OPM SCORE 5

It took former *OPM* EIC John Davison including *Colony Wars* as one of his all-time greats to jog Joe's memory: "Of course! *Colony Wars*—it has to be on the list!" It was Joe who scored the game an impressive five out of five, and with that kind of endorsement, how could we not include it? *Colony Wars* is a true sci-fi epic, putting players in the cockpits of various spacecraft. With outstanding cinematics and downright gorgeous graphics, *Colony Wars* featured colossal 3D space battles in what is still considered one of the best flight-action games ever made.



CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

THE POWER OF TWO DIMENSIONS

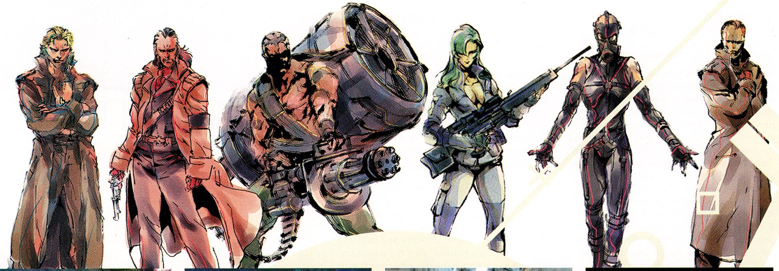
PUB. Konami DEV. Konami OPM SCORE 5

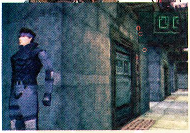
Symphony of the Night is arguably the best *Castlevania* game on any system—that's saying quite a bit considering the number of excellent games that have been released in the series. Hardcore fans would say that it's only the best of the "Metroidvania" series—a term used to describe *Castlevania*'s change from an action and platforming game to an adventure game with exploration elements similar to those found in Nintendo's *Metroid* games. At any rate, it's an amazing game with an equally amazing soundtrack.

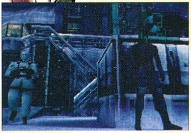
1998

JUST GETTING STARTED

Japanese development powerhouses like Konami and Square dominate the year with some of the most unforgettable legends in gaming history.







METAL GEAR SOLID

A TRUE ESSENTIAL ADVENTURE

PUB. Konami DEV. Konami OPM SCORE 5

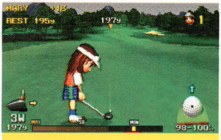
Only one game has been unanimously heralded by the industry as a fundamental part of the PlayStation experience, and that's Hideo Kojima's epic, *Metal Gear Solid*. It pioneered the tactical stealth-action genre on the PlayStation, it demonstrated a good mix of cinematic storytelling and pure action gameplay, and it pushed the limits of how games and their players can interact (breaking the fourth wall by reading your memory card and requiring you to switch controllers). No other game (not even *FFVII*) is spoken about with such reverence from all gamers as the original *MGS*.

Keiji Inafune, creator of the *Mega Man* and *Onimusha* series says, "I was moved by Kojima-san's military stylings and expression, as well as the marvelous effects and graphical presentation. I don't think the subsequent stealth-action titles have lived up to the *MGS* series."

Alex Ward, creative director at Criterion (the *Burnout* series), explains, "The U.S. version of this arrived at the same time as *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* for the N64. This game explains why—shock! horror!—I have never played *Zelda*. How could I care about a deku tree when there were terrorists holding nuclear weapons? I love the story, the score, the pacing, the ending. Brilliant. A masterpiece."

OPM columnist Zoe Flower adds, "When *Metal Gear* hit the PlayStation, it blew my mind and helped me realize my fantasy of being an international superspy. With my background in PC gaming, I never thought to look to a console to offer a deep, immersive story line that tackles philosophical and political issues while creating a new style of strategic gameplay with what is now the heavily popularized stealth genre. Even if you can't handle the long sessions of cinematic beauty or expansive dialogue, just get someone to load up the final scene for you to play through. You'll have to be a fan after that."

> "I LOVE THE STORY, THE SCORE, THE PACING, THE ENDING. A MASTERPIECE."



HOT SHOTS GOLF

GOLF – FRUSTRATION = FUN!

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Camelot OPM SCORE 4

You may not like golf. It doesn't matter. Once you get sucked in by *Hot Shots*' seductive playability, you will not get out. This game, the first in a still-running series, turned the sometimes soporific sport into quick-fix gaming gold, most especially with its excellent multiplayer competition (notable for allowing idle players to razz the active golfer with simple button presses). What's more impressive is that the gameplay is surprisingly realistic, even in the minigolf mode—a feature the series has yet to properly revive, meaning the first game is still the best.

CRASH BANDICOOT 3: WARPED

GRAPHICALLY GORGEOUS

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Naughty Dog OPM SCORE 5

The original *Crash Bandicoot* is debatably one of the most significant games on the PS1. Not only is it fun, it's drop-dead gorgeous. "[*Crash*] was one of the most beautiful games created for that platform and dominated the PS1 market for good reason," says Ted Price, head of Insomniac.

Even Evan Wells, copresident of Naughty Dog, couldn't resist talking up *Crash*'s visual appeal. "The first *Crash* game looked so much better and more detailed than any other 3D game available at the time that it didn't seem possible that it was running on the same hardware."

The series unequivocally and justifiably cemented Naughty Dog's reputation as a company at the vanguard of technology — especially in the realm of graphics—and Crash served Sony well as an unofficial mascot, helping propel the PS1 to its unmatched prominence. Few other PlayStation games even approach the series in terms of impact. w*Warped*—the third in the franchise— because it's the best of the bunch. It hits all the right notes: The satisfyingly varied gameplay ranges from straight platforming to flying in free-roaming levels; the opportunity for Crash to earn new skills adds a rare degree of depth.

TENCHU: STEALTH ASSASSINS

THE BIRTH OF A GENRE

PUB. Activision DEV. Acquire OPM SCORE 4

There are some who argue that *Tenchu* kicked off the whole stealth-action craze, beating *MGS* to store shelves by a month. True or not, we like it because of the ninjas. Unlike myriad in-your-face action games, *Tenchu* treats the ubiquitous ninja archetype with real care by emphasizing patience and subterfuge over reckless abandon and rewarding crafty players with numerous one-shot "stealth kill" animations. As *OPM* columnist Zoe Flower puts it, "*Tenchu* never made you question your mission to kill so many people with so little noise."

SUIKODEN II

VIRTUALLY UNMATCHED IN SCALE

PUB. Konami DEV. Konami OPM SCORE 4

Leaving *Suikoden II* off our essential RPG list of a few issues back was a grievous oversight. Its cast of 108 characters makes for an astonishingly deep and varied combo combat system, and its varied gameplay offers a real sense of scope, with battles ranging from 1-on-1 duels to large-scale tactical troop skirmishes. But the epic story of politics, rebellion, and intrigue is what really sets the game apart from the save-the-world RPG norm. That, and the absolutely unmatched orchestral score. If you don't buy the game, at least buy the soundtrack.

GRAN TURISMO

THE DRIVE OF YOUR LIFE

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Polyphony Digital OPM SCORE 5

Racing simulations weren't anything new to consoles by the time *Gran Turismo* came around, but it was certainly the first great racing simulation, and it still holds up well today. First and foremost, it offers an almost outrageous number of cars to choose from, ranging from standard sedans to slightly more exotic vehicles—all of which perform much like their real-life counterparts. "A very accurate simulation which took the driving game to a new level and brought it to a new audience," says Peter Molyneux, founder of Lionhead Studios. And that's what makes *Gran Turismo* so special. You feel you're learning not only how to drive, but how to drive high-performance cars in a series of tests. It's these tests that really showcase how much of a simulator *Gran Turismo* actually is—if you play them as you would an arcade racing game's tracks, then you're going nowhere fast, but if you take the time to learn the mechanics of real driving (which entails understanding terms like driving line and torque), then you'll be zipping along the track in no time. Also, for its time, *Gran Turismo* offered the most visually realistic racing experience, which complemented its realistic gameplay—it was the first real inkling at how technologically advanced games were going to get, that they someday might reach real-world territory.

KLONOA: DOOR TO PHANTOMILE

AN UNDERAPPRECIATED PLATFORMING MASTERPIECE

PUB. Namco DEV. Namco OPM SCORE 5

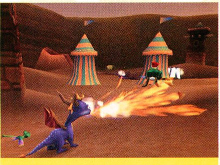
In the glory days of the PS1, we saw a spate of platform games dubbed "2.5D" after the practice of rendering a 3D environment but restraining characters' movement to two dimensions. *Klonoa* is easily one of the best—if not the best—of the 2.5D platformers. The cute, cartoony visuals disguise a subtly deep game, in which every enemy is a potential weapon and every door offers passage into a beautifully illustrated wonderland. Platforming fans would do well to seek out this groundbreaking game.

TOMBA!

STRANGE AND WONDERFUL AND VERY, VERY PINK

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Whoopee Camp OPM SCORE 4

Is it an RPG? A platformer? An adventure game? Yes! This quirky little number is as hard to pin down as it is to *put* down. By melding elements of wildly different game types and infusing them with a healthy sense of the bizarre, Whoopee Camp created one of the most charmingly odd games seen on the PS1. *Tomba!* features a pink-haired caveman who attacks porcine enemies by *biting them on the ass.* It may not surprise you that Whoopee Camp's founder went on to produce *Ico.*



SPYRO THE DRAGON

REMINDS US THAT GAMES ARE FUN

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Insomniac OPM SCORE 4

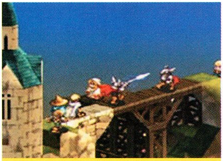
Spyro the Dragon wasn't the first successful platformer for the PlayStation, and it may not be the best, but it did manage to fix many of the quirks that had plagued platformers. Beautiful, bright cartoonlike graphics build the perfect frame, and intuitive controls and a well-tuned camera make the experience enjoyable. But *Spyro* is more than the sum of its parts: In streamlining the 3D platformer formula, it became one of the few Sony games to capture the Nintendo spirit of the perfect platformer and provide a fun, effortless, and accessible experience.

XENOGEARS

AMBITIOUS AND RELIGIOUS

PUB. Squaresoft DEV. Squaresoft OPM SCORE 4

Square made its fortune on the back of the *Final Fantasy* series. *Xenogears*, however, proved the company had far more up its RPG sleeve than moogles and chocobos. Featuring a millennia-spanning story (so massive that the second half had to be presented as a summary), *Xenogears* is perhaps the most popular original creation to result from Square's 32-bit renaissance. And the most controversial: Its religious content nearly prevented the game from seeing a U.S. release. Yet for sheer ambition, few games could ever hope to compare.



FINAL FANTASY TACTICS

THE FIRST AND BEST TACTICAL RPG

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Squaresoft OPM SCORE 4

The rest of the gaming world, including us, will tell you that *FFVII* is the most essential RPG on the PlayStation. But we actually like *Final Fantasy Tactics* a little more. Sure, it being a tactical RPG gives it a significantly steeper learning curve than *FFVII* has, and its graphics don't wow as much as that game's. But *Tactics*' turn-based formula and incredibly rigorous gameplay set the standard for all tactical RPGs to follow. With an even crazier story than *FFVII*'s, and fun occupations for your characters like calculator, ninja, and dancer, this one's a true classic.

ODDWORLD: ABE'S EXODDUS

GIVES NEW MEANING TO THE TERM "GAME WORLD"

PUB. GT Interactive

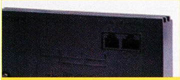
DEV. Oddworld

OPM SCORE 4.5

Pop in an *Oddworld* game and one of the first things you'll notice is that its world is a rich one, fully fleshed out with characters that are diverse and entertaining. And there's a reason for that: Oddworld was fully imagined by the creator, Lorne Lanning, before a single game was even begun. *Abe's Exoddus* is the peak of the series' PlayStation entries, complete with a neat control setup that has you use keys to talk with and issue commands to NPCs.

10 ESSENTIAL PERIPHERALS

MUST-HAVE HARDWARE



NETWORK ADAPTOR

The original PS2 wasn't built for online gaming, but the Network Adaptor, an attachment that lets you hook up to a broadband or dial-up line, came out a year later.

PlayStation 2
8MB
MEMORY CARD
MagicGate

MEMORY CARD

The first and most essential peripheral purchase a PlayStation owner should make. After all, without one, you can't even save (and in some cases, play) your games!

LOGITECH DRIVING FORCE PRO

Created specifically for *Gran Turismo 4* and capable of 900-degree turns, this top-of-the-line product is the Cadillac of steering wheels. A must-have for hardcore racing fans.

SONY
SELECT
START
ANALOG

DUALSHOCK 2

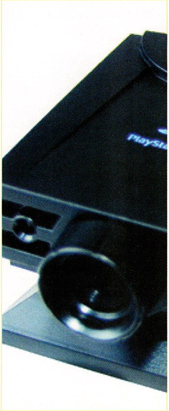
It fits perfectly in your hands, and the controls are intuitively arranged. The DualShock 2 remains the best game controller ever—hopefully Sony remembers that with the DualShock 3.

GUNCON2

Though you can only buy it packaged in a bundle with a game that support it , the Guncon2 is the ultimate in lightguns, with a well-designed button layout and precisely tuned controls.

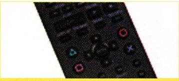
LOGITECH CORDLESS ACTION CONTROLLER

The compact design and excellent battery life (two AA batteries will last for up to 50 hours with the rumble effects turned on) make this a must-have.



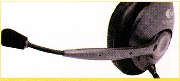
EYETOY

Whether you're flipping pancakes in a minigame or pasting your photograph on a digital avatar in *MLB 2006*, Sony's proprietary camera lets you truly get in the game.



DVD REMOTE

The PS2's DVD-playing ability was much touted, but Sony didn't make as much noise about the fact that you really needed to buy this remote to get much use out of that function.



LOGITECH HEADSET

It's tough to do a verbal victory dance without a headset. Our favorite is Logitech's version, which is the most durable and comfortable one on the market.

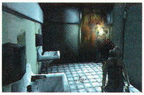
GUITAR HERO SG CONTROLLER

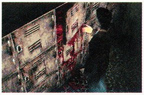
We originally had a dancepad here, but let's face it: *Guitar Hero* kicks any pansy dance-game's ass. If you have a rock bone in your body, you need this axe and the game it's bundled with.

1999

M IS FOR MATURE AUDIENCES

The PlayStation's third full year saw a marked rise in Mature-rated games as developers tested the boundaries technically and culturally.





SILENT HILL

USING THE POWER OF THE PS1 TO MAKE YOU SQUIRM

PUB. Konami DEV. Konami OPM SCORE 4

Silent Hill deserves respect for taking the campy zombie-flick horror formula of *Resident Evil* and turning it into a genuinely disturbing experience. Using unsettling camera angles, pervasive fog, and cunning manipulation of light and darkness, this game was one of the first to cross the line from horror to terror. Sure, it trots out some of the tired adventure-game puzzle clichés, and in its basic structure it doesn't deviate far from the path that *Resident Evil* and *Alone in the Dark* struck.

What's significant is that the game slathered atmosphere and emotional (rather than just visceral) involvement onto the survival-horror frame, making this one of the first games to really use the 32-bit power of the PS1 to mess with players' heads. (A good example is the almost-invisible, walking, giggling baby in the school, which was inserted for no purpose other than to creep the hell out of players.)

> ONE OF THE FIRST GAMES TO CROSS THE LINE FROM HORROR TO TERROR.

While later games in the series refined the formula, it's hard to recapture the initial "what the hell *is* that?" horror of your first-ever visit to *Silent Hill*. "To this day I am afraid of fog and radio static," says Zoe Flower. "This is the *Jaws* of the PlayStation."

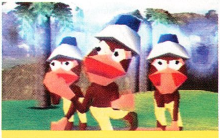
FIRST ATTACK

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3

2D FIGHTING AT ITS FINEST

PUB. Capcom DEV. Capcom OPM SCORE 5

Of 2D fighters on the PlayStation, few match the superb quality of *Street Fighter Alpha 3*. Technically the game is a big achievement: The PlayStation's low amount of system memory makes it difficult to do fluid sprite animation, or at least the animation found in most of Capcom's 2D arcade fighters. But this is a nearly arcade-perfect port of the best 2D fighter on the original PlayStation, or on any platform for that matter—its refined *Street Fighter* mechanics combined with the excellent alpha counter system brought the series to a whole new level.



APE ESCAPE

DUAL ANALOG REQUIRED

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. SCEI OPM SCORE 5

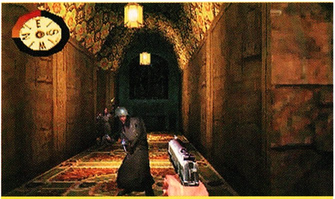
It may look like a typical 3D platformer, but *Ape Escape* was actually a risky endeavor for Sony: It was the first PlayStation game to *require* the innovative dual analog controller. As with so many games designed to be showcases for new technology, its gameplay is a little basic; as with so many 32-bit platformers, its interface is a little clumsy. But the clever innovations built around Sony's brilliant controller more than make up for the flaws. The great graphics and goofy theme don't hurt either. Who could hate 100 monkeys wearing police sirens as hats?

R-TYPE DELTA

A GREAT 2D SHOOTER

PUB. Irem DEV. Irem OPM SCORE 4.5

The 32-bit era was a challenge for developers who had cut their teeth on older systems. The experience netted in 20 years of 2D games was rendered obsolete by the new intricacies of 3D, and many former creative powerhouses found themselves scrambling to adjust. With *R-Type Delta*, Irem made the best of both worlds. Everything is rendered in the gorgeous 3D the PlayStation is so good at pushing. Everything, that is, except the gameplay, which sticks to the tried-and-true model that made the *R-Type* series a classic to begin with.



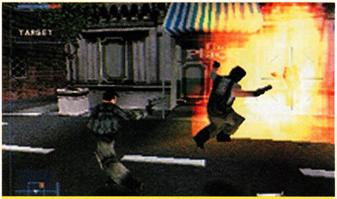
MEDAL OF HONOR

INTRODUCED PLAYSTATION GAMING TO WORLD WAR II

I PUB. EA Games DEV. DreamWorks OPM SCORE 5

This celebrated World War II shooter carries two distinctions that propelled it into gaming history and onto this list. First, when originally released, it was largely regarded as the best console FPS since *GoldenEye 007* for the N64. Second, with its painstaking realism and attention to historical detail, it marked the start of what would become a hugely successful series for EA, as well as spawned an entire gaming subgenre of World War II shooters (the fine *Call of Duty* and other copycats would soon follow).

Developed by Steven Spielberg's DreamWorks Interactive and inspired by his 1998 film classic *Saving Private Ryan*, *Medal of Honor* is an FPS for the ages, featuring big, epic levels, smart enemy AI, and authentic WWII details down to the newsreel mission briefings and weaponry that covers everything from the Thompson SMG and the Stielhandgranate (potato masher) to the M1 Garand, Browning automatic rifle, Colt 45, and the Mark II frag grenade. Reviewers particularly praised the brilliant, you-are-there sound design, as heard in the soldiers' frenetic yelling and the ricochets of bullets off walls and helmets. This realism rang true for *Resident Evil* Director Shinji Mikami: "[*Medal of Honor*] superbly conveyed the chaotic nature of war."



SYPHON FILTER

THE GAME THAT BEGA T SAM FISHER

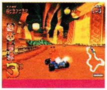
I PUB. 989 Studios DEV. Eidetic OPM SCORE 4

You have to give developer Eidetic credit: It made *Bubsy 3D*, widely reviled as one of the worst PlayStation games ever, and then turned around and made the third-person action-thriller *Syphon Filter*, a critical and financial hit that helped usher in the whole stealth style of gameplay.

In a story straight out of *24*, you play Gabe Logan, an operative for the covert government entity known only as "The Agency." Your task is to stop the spread of a deadly virus in the Third World, and nab those responsible. Heady stuff.

While *Syphon Filter* draws inevitable comparisons to *Metal Gear Solid* (with a little *Golden-Eye and Tomb Raider* thrown in), it's much more than a wannabe. The missions that have you sneak around walls, duck behind crates, and take out bad guys in sniper-like fashion provide great variety; the level design is "brilliant" according to Fumito Ueda (*Ico*, *Shadow of the Colossus*); and the enemy AI sets new standards in gameplay mechanics (they actually run for cover when they spot you!). Plus, the game's arsenal includes a taser that, when used effectively, can light an enemy on fire. Cool.

It's not a stretch to say that *Syphon Filter* is big reason why stealth-type games are so popular today.



CRASH TEAM RACING

MULTIPLAYER PERFECTION

I PUB. Sony CEA
DEV. Naughty Dog
OPM SCORE 5

If you were to look at *Crash Team Racing* in terms of impact, you might be disappointed. It didn't really break new ground. It didn't really sell systems. It didn't really match the previous three *Crash* games in terms of substance. So why does Steve Chiang, general manager of EA Tiburon, call it an "amazing accomplishment"? Probably because it took the *Mario Kart* formula and tweaked it to perfection, and did it with some of the most impressive graphics on the PS1. It's still one of the all-time best multiplayer games on the system.

10 ESSENTIAL SERIES

LANDMARK FRANCHISES IN PLAYSTATION HISTORY

FINAL FANTASY

Final Fantasy VII brought role-playing games into the mainstream, *FFX* took the franchise into the next generation, and *FFXI* brought it all online.

GRAN TURISMO

Since *Gran Turismo*'s introduction on the PS1, developer Polyphony Digital has fine-tuned it into the quintessential racing simulation series.

GRAND THEFT AUTO

No series blends controversy and quality like *Grand Theft Auto*. Love it or hate it, Rockstar Games' flagship franchise trumps just about everything else in terms of pure mindshare.

MADDEN NFL

Crow all you want about the perpetual lack of forward movement in *Madden*—EA knows better than to fix something that ain't broken, and the sales numbers continue to place the series at the top of the console-gaming food chain year after year.

METAL GEAR SOLID

Killer gameplay, cutting-edge visuals, superb voice acting, and one hell of a twisted story: *Metal Gear Solid* and its sequels sport every crucial element of a landmark franchise.

RATCHET & CLANK

Effectively SCEA's answer to Nintendo's *Mario* series, *Ratchet* and its three sequels bring new life to a genre that fell long ago into the deepest depths of *Crash Bandicoot* tepidity.

RESIDENT EVIL

Capcom coined the term "survival-horror" with *Resident Evil*, which—laughable voice acting aside—paved the way for some of the spookiest gaming experiences ever.

BURNOUT

The *Gran Turismo* of arcade-style racers, *Burnout* brings home the kind of fast, loose action we haven't seen since *Ridge Racer*'s glory days. The s eries hit its stride with *Burnout 3*—and it shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon.

SOCOM

Throughout three iterations thus far, the PS2's premier online title continues to maintain a healthy status as the king of console-based shooters. And serious Navy involvement during development has made the franchise more realistic than most.

SOUL CALIBUR

As good as *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter* may be, no fighting-game series gets gamers quite as hot and bothered as *Soul Calibur* does. Network support may be the only thing that stands between *Soul Calibur* and perfection.

2000

THE PASSING OF THE BATON

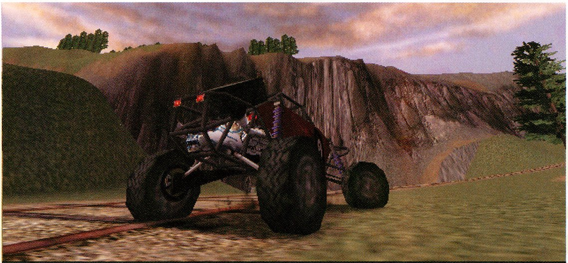
The PlayStation 2 may have launched in November of this year, but the original PlayStation proved it had plenty of life left.

VAGRANT STORY

NEAR PERFECT

PUB. Squaresoft DEV. Squaresoft OPM SCORE N/A

"It was a near-perfect title in all regards," says Keiji Inafune (*Mega Man*, *Onimusha*) in praise of *Vagrant Story*, an RPG that expertly mixed action-adventure elements with RPG gameplay (it was developed by the same team that made *Final Fantasy Tactics*). *Vagrant Story*'s allure could be found in the way it "left the gameplay and story up to the player," according to Inafune. For its time, *Vagrant Story* also boasted some of the best character designs and cinematics ever seen in a game. "The character modeling is superb," notes Shinji Mikami (*Resident Evil*).



SMUGGLER'S RUN

THE EVENT HORIZON OF GRAPHICS

PUB. Rockstar DEV. Rockstar San Diego OPM SCORE 4.5

When the PS2 was first announced, lots of promises were made about the power of its Emotion Engine, how it would revolutionize gaming with this and usher in a new age of that. But when the PS2 games started trickling in, few of them really knocked us off our feet. And then *Smuggler's Run* came along.

In terms of gameplay, it's nothing special: a reasonably simple free-roaming checkpoint race across varied terrain. It's plenty entertaining but not terribly earthshaking. For that you have to look to the graphics.

With *Smuggler's Run*, you're racing through these gigantic levels—virtually miles to a side—and you can see *everything*. If you see a mountain way off on the horizon, drive toward it and eventually you'll be there. This had an enormously powerful effect on gamers accustomed to the nasty pop-up and limited draw distance of PS1 games.

It's almost irrelevant that the game is so entertaining. It's simple and shallow, to be sure, but it gets the feel of off-road vehicles just right, making this one of the PS2's first pure sugar highs.

> ONE OF THE PS2'S FIRST PURE SUGAR HIGHS.

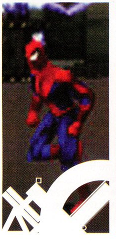
FIELD EFFECT
Serge
Miki
Leena

CHRONO CROSS

AND YOU THOUGHT YOU THREW A GOOD PARTY

PUB. Squaresoft DEV. Squaresoft OPM SCORE 5

It's rare for an RPG to allow you much choice in deciding whom to bring along on whatever epic quest you're pursuing. What makes *Chrono Cross* so innovative is that it gives you up to 40 different party members to choose from, a standard topped only by the *Suikoden* series. In addition to the rich replay value (different party members dictate the paths available to you), the game introduced a then-innovative combat system that let you combine both physical and magical attacks in a single turn.



SPIDER-MAN

GASP, A GREAT SUPERHERO GAME BEFORE 2004!

PUB. Activision DEV. Neversoft OPM SCORE 5

Back in 2000, a little company called Neversoft developed a *Spider-Man* game after embarking on its *Tony Hawk* cash cow, and the result was perhaps the best *Spider-Man* game a Spidey fan could ask for. It is 3D, it has both swinging and brawling action, and it boasts a colorful cast of cool baddies. It even made the worst villain of the '90s, Carnage, cool by fusing him with Doctor Octopus. If you think great comic games started with *X-Men Legends* or *The Incredible Hulk*, then you need to hunt down this gem.

PERSONA 2: ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

POKÉMON FOR THE MATURE

PUB. Atlus DEV. Atlus OPM SCORE 4.5

***Pokémon* who?** Long before Nintendo turned the world on to the pleasures of "catchin' 'em all," Atlus created an RPG series called *Megami Tensei*. But Jack Frost aside, it has no cuddly mascots to capture, just powerful demons that have to be persuaded to join your side. One of the best *MegaTen* titles (as fans call the series) is *Persona*. The even better *Persona 2*, set in the modern day, is hardly RPG fantasy fluff—it's packed with the challenging, strategic gameplay that genre addicts live for.

RAYMAN 2: THE GREAT ESCAPE

OOH, INNOVATIVE CONCEPT: GAMES CAN BE FUN

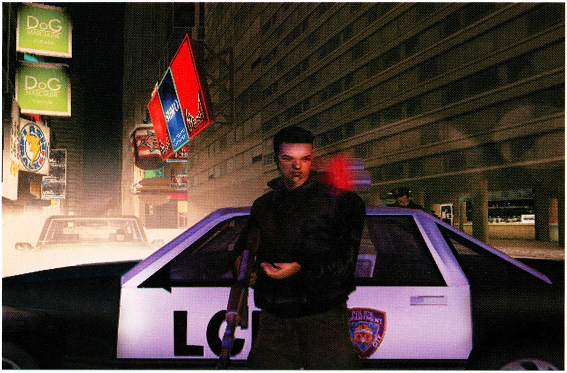
PUB. Ubisoft DEV. Ubisoft OPM SCORE 4

Michel Ancel's (*Beyond Good & Evil, King Kong*) Rayman, the titular hero with phantom limbs, was a perfect fit for a platforming game; the sense of humor and charm that pervaded the character were almost instantly endearing. *Rayman 2* took the series forward, moving from 2D side-scrolling gameplay into full-on 3D platform jumping, leaping, and bounding (all the more enjoyable thanks to the invisible arms and legs), and the huge variety of worlds let you learn and then utilize a wide variety of skills.

2001

GOING IN WITH A BANG

In only its first full year, the PlayStation 2 was graced with hall-of-fame games that ran the gamut between art and controversy...and sometimes both.



GRAND THEFT AUTO III

THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL VIDEOGAME EVER?

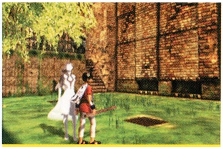
PUB. Rockstar Games DEV. Rockstar North OPM SCORE 5

The original *Grand Theft Auto* threw everybody for a loop, yes, but *GTA3* was the big one. Rockstar North's contentious crime adventure dropped gamers into a rich 3D world of unparalleled possibilities, offering options that ranged from story-based mission objectives to depraved, violent, and *gratifying* fun in the seedy streets of Liberty City. "When I first played this game, I wasn't prepared for just how different it would be," says *OPM* contributor Greg Ford. "The freedom it offered was incredible. I remember playing this at night, then going into work the next day and having *World's Scariest Police Chases*–esque stories to tell my coworkers."

The open-ended gameplay, however, wasn't what U.S. senators, congressmen, and right-wing activist groups picked up on. Rather, *GTA3* soon found itself in the hot seat for its mature themes, including graphic violence, explicit dialogue, and glorification of criminal behavior—making it a favorite scapegoat in lawsuits and juvenile court hearings. Insomniac Games CEO Ted Price muses on the controversy that *GTA3* inspired, commenting, "For better or for worse, *GTA* made the rest of the world take notice of what used to be considered simple toys for kids." But Price is also quick to sing the game's praises: "Below *GTA3*'s controversial wrapping was a 'go anywhere, do anything' design philosophy that completely redefined the action-adventure genre, [giving] players a refreshing alternative to what had become standard linear design...and millions responded to its call."

> A GO-ANYWHERE, DO-ANYTHING DESIGN.

As did an insane number of competing developers, who soon blanketed the market with less-than-stellar *GTA3* pretenders. Few if any of these knockoffs lived up to the success (or the quality) of their inspiration, yet Rockstar itself still continues to soar higher with every subsequent *GTA* installment. While *GTA3* now rests out of the limelight proper, it just might go down in history as the most controversial videogame ever made.



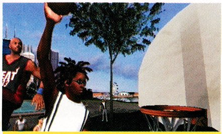
ICO

THE VIDEOGAME AS ART

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Sony CEI OPM SCORE 5

***Ico* seems to** be one of those games where you either get it or...you don't. If you do get it, you *really* get it—Joe, for example, considers it one of the greatest games ever made. The critical praise for this beautiful, moving puzzle-adventure is almost immeasurable. And that goes for game designers, too: For example, Evan Wells of Naughty Dog says that for many, *Ico* was "the first videogame to be considered 'art.'" And *Prince of Persia* creator Jordan Mechner says, "I was deeply drawn into *Ico*, which impressed me as a real work of art."

Unfortunately, consumers of the day didn't seem to see what all the fuss was about, and the game was a commercial flop. Ted Price of Insomniac laments, "I can't think of any game that was more lauded by critics but did so poorly at retail." A too-simple battle system, frustrating puzzles, and disappointing length (about six or eight hours) have all been cited as turnoffs for *Ico* haters. But we say quality is more important than quantity, and if you have not at least tried this game, you are missing out on one of the most moving experiences in videogames.

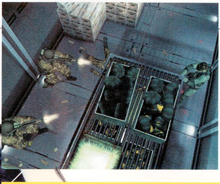


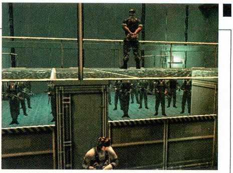
NBA STREET

TAKING B–BALL TO NEW HEIGHTS

PUB. EA Sports Big DEV. EA Sports Big OPM SCORE 5

Midway was on to something with the original *NBA Jam*, an arcade-style basketball game featuring over-the-top dunks and action. Unfortunately, the company dipped into that well a few too many times, and the subgenre seemingly died out. Then *NBA Street* arrived on the scene and reminded us why arcade basketball is so much fun. It's enjoyable by fans and nonfans alike, thanks to its slick controls, graphics that showcase some of the best player models ever seen in a basketball game (at the time of its release), and flat-out addictive gameplay.





METAL GEAR SOLID 2 SONS OF LIBERTY

CREATOR CONTROVERSY

PUB. Konami DEV. Konami OPM SCORE 5

It'd be easy to explain why, as a game, *Metal Gear Solid 2* is pretty damn good. It builds on the gameplay of the pioneering *MGS*, while adding things like first-person shooting and the option to tranquilize every enemy (for those who don't like killing). What really makes *MGS2* noteworthy, though, is its controversial casting choice. You play as Solid Snake, who has now grown from being just a PS2 icon into one for the whole gaming industry, for only a brief hour or two. Then the rest of the game has you playing as Raiden, who many consider to be an impostor. Kojima and the press kept this secret from everyone, and there was quite a bit of mewling over the character switch. Insomniac CEO Ted Price is circumspect: "I think a lot of people either loved or hated this game. I belong in the former camp. The storytelling was fantastic, the stealth gameplay set the standard for third-person action-adventures, and the visuals were awesome." We still think the game is great despite the character switch, and we applaud Kojima for being daring enough to pull off such a drastic gameplay mechanic and not break the game in the process. To date, no one else has pulled off such a crazy stunt.

> WHAT REALLY MAKES MGS2 NOTEWORTHY IS ITS CONTROVERSIAL CASTING.

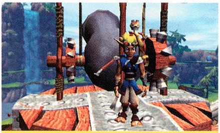
ATV OFFROAD FURY

BIG AIR IS STILL A BIG DEAL

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Rainbow OPM SCORE 4

Only when you find yourself at the end of its game world do you understand the full scope of *ATV Offroad Fury*. When you reach that invisible wall, you crash in dramatic and spectacular fashion: The camera zooms out, and you see yourself and your ATV thrown for what seems like miles. Then you fall like a rag doll—bump, bump, splat.

But great crashing is hardly the reason *Offroad Fury* made this list. Try big air, massive open areas, awesome hill-filled tracks, ATVs that can be tweaked down to the details, and a repertoire of dozens of tricks.



JAK AND DAXTER: THE PRECURSOR LEGACY

A TECHNOLOGICAL BIO

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Naughty Dog OPM SCORE 5

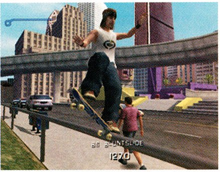
We may not be as fond of the edgier route taken by later games in the *Jak* series, but we can't deny the series' impact on the PS2. *Jak and Daxter* shows us what a driven, talented development team can do with the PS2—namely, create a huge platforming world with unbelievable graphics and zero load times. Later *Jak* games placed greater emphasis on story (and guns!), darkening the first game's lighthearted focus and costing the series some of its charm. But the original game still has us hooked.

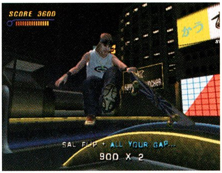
RED FACTION

CEMENTED THE IMPORTANCE OF STORY IN SHOOTERS

PUB. THQ DEV. Volition OPM SCORE 5

While *Half-Life* on PC made the idea of a story-based first-person shooter a reality, *Red Faction* went a step further by upping the ante technologically. Its so-called Geo-Mod engine lets you deform the environment in real time, carving out your own niche in the game world. Add in a bunch of player-driven vehicles (very unusual for the time), and you have an FPS that gave *Half-Life* a run for its money. The interesting and occasionally amusing story of a miner's revolution on Mars sweetened the deal.





TONY HAWK'S

PRO SKATER 3

NEVERSOFT MAKES THE GREAT EVEN GREATER

PUB. Activision DEV. Neversoft OPM SCORE 5

By the time most game series hit their third installment, they begin to get stale, deteriorating in the quality that made them great in the first place.

Developer Neversoft pulled a perfect 180 on this trend with *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3*. Shattering all myths about what sequels generally are, *Tony Hawk 3* showed us what sequels could and *should* be. Bigger and better levels, a hugely expanded and balanced trick system, and highly addictive gameplay prompted most reviewers to declare the previous *Tony Hawk* games obsolete. Plus, *Tony Hawk 3* has the distinction of being the first PS2 game people could play online—even before Sony released its online adapter.

Evan Wells of Naughty Dog lauds the *Tony Hawk* series for "pioneering an entire new extreme-sports genre."

Speaking specifically of the equally stellar *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2*, Ted Price wonders, "Who knew that skateboarding could be so mainstream? From the very beginning, *Tony Hawk* simply owned the extreme-sports genre and continues to do so today. The first *Tony Hawk* gave players the thrill of catching huge air and pulling insane tricks without the risk of broken ankles or jail time. It also satisfied players' desires to experience the 'fantasy of the familiar' versus playing the role of more traditional mascot characters. (Not that there's anything wrong with purple dragons or orange bandicoots...)"

The *Tony Hawk* series remains one of the few game franchises to become a cultural phenomenon. It's still going strong with the recent release of *Tony Hawk's American Wasteland*.

> TONY HAWK 3 SHOWED US WHAT SEQUELS COULD AND SHOULD BE.

FINAL FANTASY X

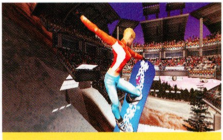
FINDING YOUR VOICE

PUB. Square Enix

DEV. Square Enix

OPM SCORE 5

The first *Final Fantasy* game to appear on the PS2—and for that alone it deserves some attention—*FFX*'s significance may not be all that noteworthy in the grand scheme of things, but it's the first *Final Fantasy* to feature voice acting. This is a pretty big deal since most fans thought the idea of putting voice in a *Final Fantasy* game wouldn't work out so well. But the actors and actresses pulled it off, which, along with a new leveling and skills system, helped create one of the more memorable *Final Fantasy* games, the first to spawn a direct sequel.

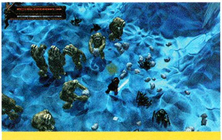


SSX TRICKY

PULLS OFF THE "PERFECT SNOWBOARDING GAME" TRICK

PUB. EA Sports Big DEV. EA Canada OPM SCORE 5

Yeah, ***SSX*** is the launch title and *SSX 3* has the mountain, but *SSX Tricky* is the one that has a freakin' Run DMC song in it! Seriously, we give the nod to *Tricky* because of its colorful cast of characters, our preference for the levels, its oodles of personality, and its spot-on controls. While *SSX 3* and *SSX on Tour* bring some legitimate enhancements to the formula, they feel more like good add-ons, while *SSX Tricky* is the one that melds everything into a pure, flawless snowboarding game.



BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE

IN WHICH CONSOLE GAMERS LEARN TO LOVE BASHING ORCS

PUB. Vivendi DEV. Snowblind OPM SCORE 4.5

PlayStation 2 gamers might be more familiar with the developer's *Champions of Norrath* franchise, but Snowblind got its action-RPG start with this multiplatform version of the classic PC franchise (its previous development work was restricted to the *Top Gear* racing games). *Dark Alliance* established the classic *D&D* franchise as a hit in its own right on consoles, proving that it was possible to build a good hack-n-slash, *Diablo*-style game for a system other than the PC.

DEVIL MAY CRY

THE BIRTH OF THE 3D ACTION GAME

PUB. Capcom DEV. Capcom OPM SCORE 5

With their doubts beginning with the arrival of the original PlayStation, the gaming community thought that polygonal-based games simply couldn't re-create the frantic and chaotic nature of 2D action games. Consoles specializing in 3D games just couldn't handle the number of enemies or the fast-paced action to deliver that sort of experience—that is, until *Devil May Cry* arrived. Developed originally as a *Resident Evil* game, *Devil May Cry*'s development shifted over to an action focus because of a bug that caused enemies to float in the air after they were shot; thus, Dante's first aerial attack was born.

Devil May Cry features an excellent combination of adventure elements derived from *Resident Evil* and action that you might see in a John Woo film. It all blends seamlessly to create an unforgettable experience and an equally unforgettable main character. "This title brought a new atmosphere and life to the world of action games," says Atsushi Inaba, creator of *Viewtiful Joe* and *Okami*. "You rarely see a game that has this much pure action and such a cool game setting."

DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION

SHOWED US THAT GAMES DON'T HAVE TO MAKE YOU FAT

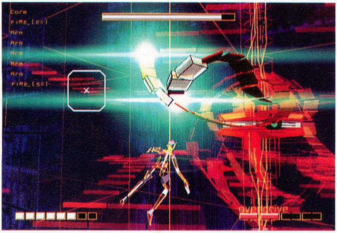
PUB. Konami DEV. Konami OPM SCORE 4.5

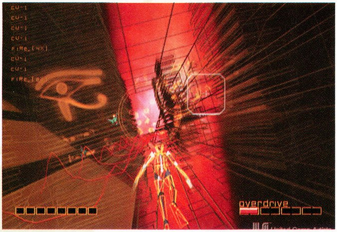
Games get a bad rap for turning kids into lazy couch potatoes, but *Dance Dance Revolution*, which requires you to drag your butt off the floor and move your feet in time to the sequence of arrows, helped people actually get in shape, and was even used as a weight-loss program in some gyms. A fantastic range of music and difficulty levels make the game accessible to just about everyone. We salute *DDR* for letting us be healthy while still having a great time.

2002

THE INNOVATORS EMERGE

The PlayStation 2's second full year may have been a quiet one, but it was no less impactful with the emergence of some truly innovative games.





REZ

DANCING TO ITS OWN BEAT

PUB. Sega DEV. Sega OPM SCORE 4.5

Let's put it this way: You've never experienced anything quite like *Rez*. Sure, on the surface it seems to be a regular 3D rail shooter, similar to games like Nintendo's *Star Fox* or Sega's *Panzer Dragoon* games, but it's much more than that. The music's thumping beats combine with the game's stylish vector graphics to create a very different gaming environment than what you're probably used to—and you'll want to keep playing, not necessarily because the gameplay is all that unique or even interesting, but because it evokes something. Maybe it's emotion, maybe it's just a super-fun rhythm game in disguise, or maybe it's something else, but there still aren't many other games out there that make you feel the groove like *Rez* does. Plus, it's the only game to make use of the trance vibrator, a peripheral you can buy to literally feel the beats in *Rez*. As you can imagine, many jokes have been made as to the specific use of the trance vibrator, but we can guarantee you that the intentions of Tetsuya Mizuguchi, the game's creator, are completely innocent.

MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE

THE GREATEST OPENING SEQUENCE IN GAMING HISTORY

PUB. EA Games DEV. DreamWorks OPM SCORE 5

It's a scene right out of the history books: *Medal of Honor: Frontline*'s opening sequence, one of the most memorable in all of gaming, starts with the D-Day assault of Normandy in 1944 and explodes with nonstop action from there. The power of *Frontline*'s opener wasn't lost on *OPM* readers: "We received letters from kids who said they bonded with their grandfathers who served in the war—some who had even been a part of the D-Day offensive," says former *OPM* Editor-in-Chief John Davison. Keiji Inafune (*Mega Man*, *Onimusha*) loves *Frontline*: "[It does] a great job of fusing the FPS genre with the realism of actual historical battlegrounds. I played this after having watched *Saving Private Ryan* and felt like I was actually out on the battlefield."

NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT 2

THE ULTIMATE DRIVE

PUB. EA Games DEV. Black Box OPM SCORE 5

Electronic Arts' storied *Need for Speed* racing franchise traces its origins to 1994's *Road & Track Presents: The Need for Speed* for the 3DO. For this list we chose our favorite, *Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2*, which puts you in control of Ferraris, Lamborghinis, and Porsches in contests against Crown Vic–driving law enforcement. *HP2* might be more arcade than simulation, but so what? You'll have a blast outrunning the red-and-blues on your tail and evading barricades, spike strips, and barrel-hurling helicopters.

THE MARK OF KRI

THE INNOVATIVE FIGHTING SYSTEM LEAVES ITS MARK

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Sony CEA OPM SCORE 3

***OPM*'s review score** for *The Mark of Kri* set off a flurry of outraged letters from readers condemning us for underrating what they thought to be a great game. They may have been right: *The Mark of Kri*'s innovative combat system that let you fight more than one enemy at a time was probably reason enough for this to become a PS2 classic. Add to this a stealth mode, a strong story, and animation inspired by cartoonist Don Bluth and you have the game EA Tiburon's Steve Chiang scores a perfect "cool."

FATAL FRAME

SIMPLY TERRIFYING

PUB. Tecmo DEV. Tecmo OPM SCORE 4

Resident Evil has the zombie angle. *Silent Hill* has the creepy, *Jacob's Ladder*–esque angle. What does that leave for the survival-horror genre but the haunted-house angle? That's just what *Fatal Frame* went for, and its excellent tactic of fighting ghosts with only a camera makes for one of the most terrifying games ever made. Like *Silent Hill*, it doesn't stray far from the survival-horror formula, but through virtuoso manipulation of the different types of fear, the game delivers an astonishingly intense, viscerally frightening experience.

KINGDOM HEARTS

GUMMIS AND MOOGLES CAN LEARN TO LOVE AND LOVE TO LEARN

PUB. Square EA DEV. Squaresoft OPM SCORE 4.5

The notion of putting the saccharine-sweet Disney catalog into the world of Square games seemed strange, yet they totally fit together like sweet 'n' sour. *Kingdom Hearts* is a fusion of two disparate companies that actually works, and like *Final Fantasy VII*, *Kingdom Hearts* introduced mainstream gamers to the PlayStation 2 (the idea of a polygonal Donald Duck running around Halloween Town was irresistible). It's also the best demonstration of a company effectively using the rich history of a classic license without being crippled by that license.

ACE COMBAT 04: SHATTERED SKIES

THE REAL TOP GUN

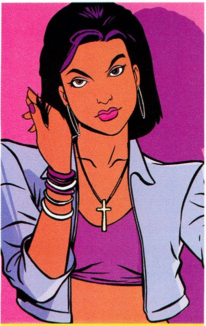
PUB. Namco DEV. Namco OPM SCORE 4.5

If you're still waiting for that proper movie-to-videogame adaptation of *Top Gun*, you're going to have to wait a little longer. While you're doing that, you need to check out *Ace Combat 04: Shattered Skies*. It may not have all the characters you know and love from *Top Gun*, but it's about as close as you're going to get to a flight-sim epic. *Ace Combat 04* has an excellent story line, which, when combined with the best flight-sim mechanics for any console game—well, you know where we're going with that.

2003

COULD FILL ITS OWN "BEST OF"

2002 turned out to be the calm before the storm, though in 2003's case, it was more like a tsunami, as the PlayStation 2 saw its biggest year ever.



GTA VICE CITY

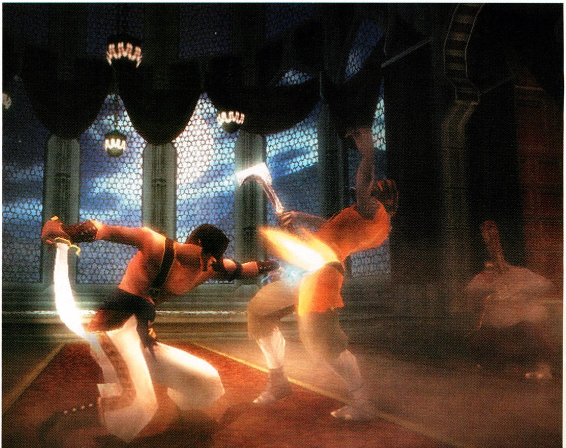
DIGITALLY RE-CREATED AN ERA

| PUB. Rockstar Games DEV. Rockstar North
OPM SCORE 5

While its gameplay was still built around the same basic structure that Rockstar pioneered in *Grand Theft Auto III*, *Vice City* went its predecessor one better by re-creating an entire era. *GTA3* depends primarily on the wit of radio announcers and songs from prior games in the series to entertain listeners, which is fun but does little to flesh out the game's somewhat generic gangster East Coast setting. *Vice City*, however, went whole-hog, re-creating a digital version of 1980s Miami. There are sockless loafers to wear, gold chains to sport in glorious open-neck shirts. Even the game's look is brighter and more garish than the gritty *GTA3*'s.

The most significant factor in accomplishing the blast back into the mid-'80s, however, is a soundtrack that evokes every pastel suit that ever strolled along Miami Beach. "Africa," "Billie Jean," "Sister Christian"—any cheesy awesome song from your childhood that you secretly dreamed about breaking out at a karaoke party is present and accounted for. Which means that in addition to wreaking havoc among the pedestrians who happen to be in your way, you are also able to sing along with the car radio—and wreak havoc upon any eardrums that happen to be in range.

> THE MID-'80S SOUNDTRACK EVOKES PASTEL.



PRINCE OF PERSIA

HOW TO REVIVE A FRANCHISE

| PUB. Ubisoft DEV. Ubisoft OPM SCORE 5

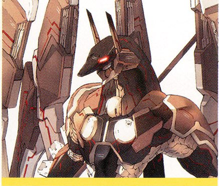
Frequent *OPM* contributor Greg Ford calls *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* "one of the best adventures ever," and we wholeheartedly agree, so much so that we named it our Game of the Year for 2003. Here's the rare game that a game sports "the whole package." Think of anything that's important to you in a game, and you'll find it in *Sands of Time*. Controls? Unbelievably fluid and intuitive. Graphics? Almost unmatched on the PS2. Story? Funny, occasionally touching, with a fantastic twist ending. Challenge? Yep—both mental and physical. Combat? Er...well, OK, maybe you can't have it all.

In truth, *The Sands of Time*'s rather simplistic combat is pretty much the only substantial reason for complaint in this excellent game. Personally, we think it's fine; while undeniably shallow, it allows the Prince to show off his fancy acrobatics, providing even more eye candy. But apparently enough people had issues with its simplicity to prompt the developers to craft a tougher, edgier, more complex Prince for the sequel, *Warrior Within*—which prompted us to reply with a resounding "Meh." That's what you get for focus-grouping a game to death.

Perhaps the most impressive characteristic of *The Sands of Time* is the fact that it's a modern update of a classic game that was *also* hailed as revolutionary for its time. In fact, *Sands* turned out so well that it wouldn't be far-fetched to suggest that it started the recent craze of updating classic franchises. The fact that so few of these other updates have been any good is a further testament to this game's quality.

Bottom line: *Sands of Time* was our favorite game in a very, very strong year for the PS2. For platform adventures, there's precious little that can even touch it.

> ONE OF THE BEST ADVENTURES EVER.



ZONE OF THE ENDERS: THE 2ND RUNNER

WHAT EVERY ANIME GAME SHOULD ASPIRE TO BE

PUB. Konami DEV. Konami OPM SCORE 4.5

If the original *Devil May Cry* showed it was possible to do hardcore 2D action in 3D, then *Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner* reaffirmed that idea while also acting as the model by which all other anime-style games should be judged. The action is fast and often crazy (there's a particularly amazing battle near the end of the game), and the semi-cel-shaded style is complemented by well-done animated cut-scenes that help push the story along. Fans of *Robotech* or other mech-oriented anime would probably be driven to tears at the sight of *ZOE2*.

SOUL CALIBUR II

SHARPENED SKILLS

PUB. Namco DEV. Namco OPM SCORE 5

While 3D fighting games may be prolific on the PS2, few are better than *Soul Calibur II*. From the character and environment design to the fighting mechanics, just about everything in *Soul Calibur II* screams perfection. But what's always been the hallmark of the game is the fact that novices can enjoy it just as much as experienced players, thanks to its straightforward controls and easy-to-understand moves. Experienced players will almost always have the upper hand, especially with soul impact moves (counters), but anyone can have a blast playing this fighter.

VIRTUA FIGHTER 4: EVOLUTION

THE TRUE KING OF FIGHTERS

PUB. Sega DEV. Sega OPM SCORE 5

To this day, no game matches Sega's *Virtua Fighter* series in terms of depth. In fact, it is responsible for spawning the 3D fighter phenomenon and opening the door for games like *Tekken*, *Dead or Alive*, and *Soul Calibur*, although none of these other fighting games, nor their sequels, really comes close to portraying fighting on a technical level the way *VF4* does. The game features robust training modes, which take you through the ins and outs of punches, kicks, grapples, counters, and even complex combinations.

.HACK

SNAZZY SEQUENTIAL STORY

PUB. Bandai DEV. CyberConnect 2

SCORES 3.5/4/4/4 (ratings for four individual titles)

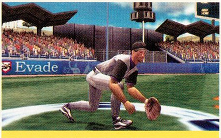
Leave it to an anime to spawn one of the most unique RPGs to hit the PS2. *.hack* features a crazy metastory, wherein you take control of a kid who likes playing a certain massively multiplayer online RPG, which results in a game within a game. When you aren't "playing" the game proper, you are checking e-mail or browsing message boards. Additionally, *.hack*'s story is so big that it is told over four games, each introducing new gameplay and plot changes. A serial RPG folded in an RPG? Count us in.

WORLD SOCCER WINNING ELEVEN 7

FEVER PITCH

PUB. Konami DEV. Konami OPM SCORE 5

With its *FIFA* series, EA Sports had some comfort in knowing that it had the best soccer game on our shores in the PS2's early years—that is, so long as Konami's *Winning Eleven* soccer series stayed in territories outside of the United States. Fortunately for all the soccer fans over here, Konami saw EA sitting pretty and decided to challenge the company head-on with *Winning Eleven 7*. Never before had a soccer game done such an excellent job of re-creating the look, feel, and flow of the sport.



HIGH HEAT MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2004

A HALL-OF-FAME PERFORMANCE

PUB. 3DO DEV. 3DO OPM SCORE 5

In his five-out-of-five review of *High Heat 2004*, *OPM* editorial alum Todd Zuniga could hardly contain his hyperboles: "This is a defining experience," he glowed. What made Todd so giddy? Was it the attention to detail so painstaking that it could take up to 90 hours to play through a 162-game season? Or maybe it was the franchise mode that included an entire minor-league system? Or perhaps it was the unbelievably realistic gameplay and animations? *High Heat 2004* delivers all that and more.

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

AN ATYPICAL HEROINE, AN EXCELLENT GAME

PUB. Ubisoft DEV. Ubisoft OPM SCORE 4.5

With green lips and a slight build, she's an unlikely candidate for stardom in a world of big-breasted videogame vixens. But Jade, along with her trusty camera and companion Pey'j (who is a pig), breaks through a lot of gaming stereotypes. She's at the center of a story that has true emotional heft, and she makes use of both action and stealth as she tries to figure out what the government is up to. (*BG&E* inspired filmmaker Peter Jackson to seek out designer Michel Ancel for the game version of *King Kong*.)

DARK CLOUD 2

EVERYTHING, INCLUDING A KITCHEN-SINK ROBOT

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Level-5 OPM SCORE 5

OK, you're going to pick up this game, and you're going to be puzzled by this whole weird story of a boy being chased by this evil clown and all that. Stick with it. Seriously. If you love the look of *Dragon Quest VIII*, you need to check out this game: While *DQ8* features only graphics made by the talented team at Level-5, the developer created all of *Dark Cloud 2*. With *DC2*, Level-5 proves it can fit tons of disparate content that could be at the heart of many individual games into one massive übergame.

MADDEN NFL 2004

BOOM!

PUB. EA Sports DEV. EA Sports OPM SCORE 5

Madden Football had to be on this list, but since there are so many games in the series (and so many with varying levels of significance), we had trouble choosing one. So we decided to go with the one that took the series in a slightly different direction—*Madden NFL 2004*. The game's biggest innovation is the Owner mode, which takes console football to new heights of stat tracking and into the realm of old PC-style football simulations. Steve Chiang, general manager of EA Tiburon agrees: "*Madden NFL 2004* is the perfect storm for *Madden* gamers."

AMPLITUDE

MUSIC-MAKING PS2

PUB. Sony CEA

DEV. Harmonix Music

OPM SCORE 4

The rhythm-music genre was nothing new when *Amplitude* came along, so another icon-scrolling, button-timing game wasn't enough to exactly rock the world. So it's not *Amplitude*'s basic gameplay that earns it a spot on this list but rather the remix mode that lets you manipulate and rearrange songs in real time—and then share your compositions online. (The fact that these songs are licensed popular tunes that just about everyone in America has heard at one point or another makes the remix function even more significant.) *Amplitude* turns your PS2 into a musical instrument, and that is a very big deal.

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

TACTICAL BEFORE TACTICAL WAS COOL

PUB. EA Games

DEV. IO Games

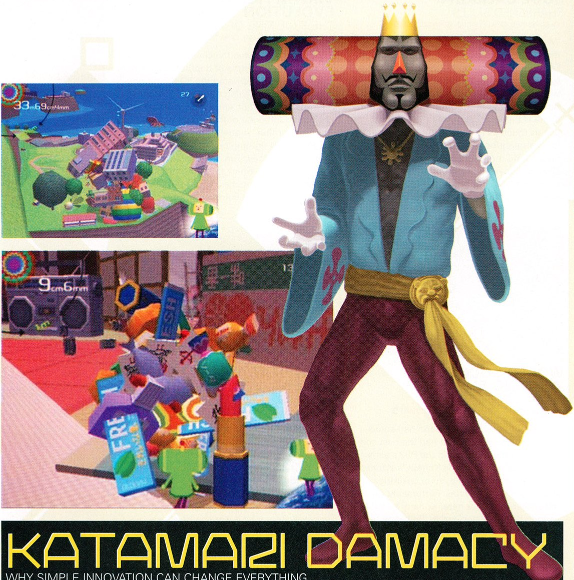
OPM SCORE 5

Well before squad-based shooters were all the rage, there was *Freedom Fighters*. This frequently overlooked game tells the tale of an alternate-history America, where the Cold War escalated into a very heated contest—and the Russians won. Putting players in the role of a member of an oppressed group was a daring move, and the hybrid gameplay was equally unorthodox for the time, requiring a mix of quick reflexes and clever personnel management. Had the spectacular tactical multiplayer mode been playable online, you probably would have heard much more from this game. As it is, we just keep hoping for a sequel.

2004

SEQUELITIS STRIKES!

Turns out, 2004 makes 2003 look like a spring shower in terms of game sales and the sheer number of great games. The emphasis is on sequels.



KATAMARI DAMACY

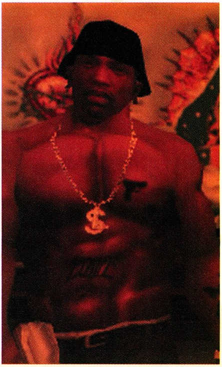
WHY SIMPLE INNOVATION CAN CHANGE EVERYTHING

PUB. Namco DEV. Namco OPM SCORE 4.5

If you had told us a year before *Katamari Damacy*'s release that the next big innovative game would consist solely of rolling things up into a ball, we would have laughed. And then we would have showered ridicule upon you. By the end of 2004, though, none of us was laughing, mostly because we were all too busy trying to master the dual-analog controls necessary to roll up thumbtacks and beach balls and penguins and judo masters and toolsheds and anything else that got in our way.

The more you roll in *Katamari*, the more fun it gets—the satisfaction of getting big enough to roll up cats that had been knocking you over a few minutes earlier is very fulfilling, and getting big enough to roll up skyscrapers could make you feel like the king of the world—that is, if that title hadn't already been claimed by the King of All Cosmos. Clad in tight purple pants and sporting an awesome medallion and a royal ruff, the king is the cherry on top of the sundae. Whether he's burying you in insults for failing or being disdainfully surprised that you actually did something right, he makes you happy to be condescended to. Among the game's fans, *Katamari* can count Fumito Ueda (*Ico*, *Shadow of the Colossus*): "[It's a] very simple and easy-to-understand game, and at the same time, it has an awesome dynamic level-upgrade system."

THE MORE YOU ROLL, THE MORE FUN IT IS.



GTA SAN ANDREAS

THE LAST GAME YOU'LL EVER NEED

PUB. Rockstar Games DEV. Rockstar North OPM SCORE 5

Hype is a hard thing to live up to: Just look at parts two and three of *The Matrix*. *GTA3* and *Vice City* sold more copies than any other games, um, ever, so given that, we feel it's no exaggeration to say that no game was more widely anticipated than *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*.

Happily, *San Andreas* did not follow the path of poor, sad Neo and his increasingly pathetic rabbit hole. Instead, it introduced a game that is perhaps deeper and more complex than any other game before or since. It felt like Rockstar, having mastered the sandbox style of environment and game structure, decided to take the concept of the sandbox one step further by incorporating all *types* of play into the game. You can play arcade games, try your hand at blackjack, shoot a few hoops, parachute out of an airplane—and none of that has anything to do with the main story of the game, which sends you traveling across three huge cities (and encountering characters from the previous two games along the way). Sure, there are other good titles out there, but with a game this comprehensive in your library, do you really need them?

DEEPER THAN ANY OTHER GAME BEFORE OR SINCE.

METAL GEAR SOLID 3 SNAKE EATER

A CURRENT-GEN CHALLENGE TO THE NEXT GEN

PUB. Konami DEV. Konami OPM SCORE 5

After taking a whole lot of heat for *Metal Gear Solid 2*, Hideo Kojima followed that up with a third installment that almost surpasses the original *MGS* at times. In a George Lucas–esque move, Kojima decided to make the newest game a prequel by having you play Snake in 1964. While the setting is retro, the gameplay isn't, as Kojima introduced hunting, camouflage, and healing systems into the core *MGS* gameplay. Additionally, *MGS3*, under Kojima's capable team, pushes the PS2's graphical capabilities to the point where we wonder whether we even need the next generation. The cinema scenes look fantastic, the jungle is immersive, and, in particular, a battle in a field of flowers with petals everywhere is an actual gameplay level and no longer a mere tech demo. On top of the graphical and gameplay enhancements, *MGS3* also hits upon the same emotional chords *Final Fantasy VII* did, with memorable characters and dialogue that all lead into the delivery of a powerful, emotional ending. *God of War* director David Jaffe succinctly describes his experience in *MGS3*: "Amazing story, amazing gameplay...I got lost in its world."

TAKEDOWN AVENGED!
IMPACT TIME

BURNOUT 3 TAKEDOWN

EVERYONE HARBORS RAGE AND LOVES IT

PUB. EA Games DEV. Criterion OPM SCORE 5

The third entry in Criterion's spectacular arcade racing series hit the *OPM* office like a tidal wave. One day, editors were being productive little worker bees putting out a magazine, and the next, they were crowded around a PS2, passing around a controller, trash-talking—and then calling home to tell significant others that work was definitely going to be running late that night. It's amazing that you saw a September 2004 issue at all, because we were a bit like drug addicts, always sticking around for just one more go.

> BURNOUT 3 HIT THE OPM OFFICE LIKE A TIDAL WAVE.

The Burnout series has been going strong since it's 2001 debut, but it wasn't until #3 that we stood up and took notice. The quick chunks of gameplay *Burnout 3* provides are perfect for 10 minutes or 10 hours; but perhaps the most beautiful aspect of the game is how accessible it is to all levels of gamer. People who play games for a living can't get enough of it, but neither can pregnant women who had never picked up a game controller before that first *Burnout* crash junction. Sure, you can show off your excellent driving skills in a good racing simulation like *Gran Turismo 4*, but *Burnout 3* offers visceral excitement that has yet to be matched.

FINAL FANTASY XI

A NEW FRONTIER IN GAMING

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Square Enix OPM SCORE 5

Though crippled by its need for the expensive (and soon abandoned) PS2 hard drive, *Final Fantasy XI* is still a landmark game. It not only takes a beloved franchise into a massively multiplayer environment—chocobos, moogles, and all—but manages to bring a real story along for the ride, a first for MMORPGs. The failure of the HDD should not diminish the significance or quality of this game, which is still going strong on the PC and in the small HDD-owning PS2 community. It's an expensive investment, what with the HDD and the monthly fee, but for online-RPG fans, there's none better.

RATCHET & CLANK: UP YOUR ARSENAL

IMPORTANCE OF THE FUN FACTOR

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Insomniac OPM SCORE 5

The *Ratchet* series is one of the most entertaining franchises on any PlayStation platform. And with its endearing mix of platforming, humor, and big freakin' guns, *Up Your Arsenal* is the most flat-out entertaining *Ratchet* game of all of them. So you see how we got here. "While it may be taboo to put games one has worked on in this list," says Insomniac's Ted Price, "the *Ratchet & Clank* series was arguably the first real attempt to break the platforming genre out of the rut in which it had become mired after the advent of 32-bit machines." We say it succeeded.

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: NOCTURNE

PARADISE REGAINED

PUB. Atlus
DEV. Atlus
OPM SCORE 4.5

Despite how brutally difficult and unforgiving it is, *Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne* also happens to be one of the most creative RPGs in the history of the PlayStation. Its gameplay mechanics, such as how you recruit enemies and then fuse them together to create new party members, make it a standout. Add the gorgeous and unique art style, the large dungeons, and the daring ties to theology (every enemy is based on a mythical god or monster from somewhere in the world, and the story prominently features Lucifer as a character), and you now have one of the most essential RPGs for the PlayStation, ever.

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2005

RETHINKING THE GAME

PUB. EA Sports DEV. EA Sports OPM SCORE 4.5

When *Tiger Woods 2002* introduced the analog swing, it flew in the face of years of expectations for golf games; having to actually manipulate the joystick—even as intuitive as it was—came as a shock. But it made for such a sensible, fluid, and visceral experience that EA started looking at the control schemes of all its games, a process that continues today. While subsequent editions of *Tiger Woods* didn't add much, enough improvements were made to make *Tiger Woods 2005* the highlight of the series.

ONIMUSHA 3: DEMON SIEGE

RESIDENT EVIL...WITH SAMURAI!

PUB. Capcom DEV. Capcom OPM SCORE 4.5

The *Onimusha* franchise proved that Capcom could do more than *Resident Evil* and *Street Fighter* games. OK, it could be argued that the first *Onimusha* really was *Resident Evil*, just set in medieval Japan. But the solid action, the period setting (where Nobunaga not only is a badass Japanese warlord in life, but becomes a demon warlord in death!), and the slick graphics make the first *Onimusha* a perfectly capable game. We're giving the nod to *Onimusha 3* because it completes the trilogy and is the first game in the series to have 3D backgrounds.

JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING

EVERYTHING BOND

PUB. EA Games DEV. EA Redwood Shores SCORE 4.5

James Bond has had a decent run of first-person shooters, but with the exception of the N64's *GoldenEye*, they've all been missing that special something that elevates a game from good to great. Enter *Everything or Nothing*, with its controversial choice of going third person. Not only does this pay off, but the game also packs in pretty much everything expected of Bond. The star talent (Pierce Brosnan modeled and voiced Bond in the game) helps wrap the overall package into quintessential James Bondage.

2005

THE PS2'S BIGGEST YEAR YET

It may have had a slow start, and maybe we thought developers were shifting to the PS3, but 2005 has proven to be the PS2's biggest year yet.

GOD OF WAR

THE PERFECT ACTION GAME

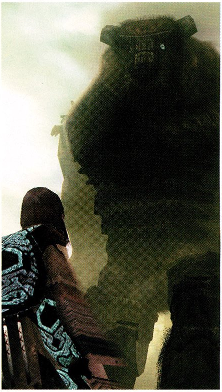
PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Sony CEA OPM SCORE 5

A lot of the games here made it onto the list by virtue of their groundbreaking elements. *God of War* is not one of them. You've beaten up monsters, you've solved puzzles, and you've upgraded abilities since you started playing videogames. In fact, everything that is in *God of War* has shown up somewhere else before—the only difference is that none of those things has ever been executed quite as perfectly as they are right here.

Instead of jumping on the innovation bandwagon, designer David Jaffe focused on perfecting all the elements into one cohesive, bang-up action game. The very first level—which we would nominate in a heartbeat for best first level ever—plunges you into the thick of things, sending you to do battle against the multiheaded Hydra. And when you're standing on the deck beneath the mother Hydra head with baby Hydra heads flanking you, and the mother head roars and the screen shakes, and you can *feel* the gusts of her scream roaring through the wind, it's so freaking awesome that it escapes any academic commentary we could provide on the subject. Says Capcom's Keiji Inafune: "I think this was one of the top cinematic action games, a culmination of the genre. They took a genre that Japanese game creators do best, took all the great things about them, added their own American spin to it, and came up with this great action-adventure game"

God of War is the quintessential action game. There is no fat here. You don't retread levels to pad out the game time; you don't chase back for that one item you failed to discover on your first pass; you don't battle waves of the same type of enemy. Instead, you simply kick ass as the amazingly cool Kratos. And you feel pretty damn exhilarated doing it. Zoe Flower puts it best: "*God of War* is the purest form of a good time on the PlayStation 2 and will remind you why you liked consoles in the first place. I actually start to salivate just thinking about it. Really."

THE PUREST FORM OF GOOD TIME ON PS2.



SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

THE VIDEOGAME AS ART, PART II

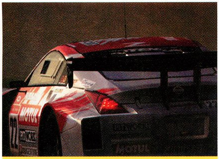
PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Sony CEI OPM SCORE 4.5

When the team that created *Ico* comes out with a new game, those of us in the business stand up and take serious notice. In spite of some odd design choices and some niggling control complaints, *Shadow of the Colossus* does not disappoint. The story has a sense of subtlety similar to *Ico*'s: A mysterious hero sets out on a morally ambiguous quest to destroy 16 enormous creatures scattered across an expansive, deserted land—all for the love of a woman.

RAISES THE BAR ON VIDEOGAME ARTISTRY.

While a series of boss battles is a rare setup for a game, it's not unprecedented. No, what's unusual about *Shadow* is its sense of scale. During encounters with the colossi, the scale is obvious: A tiny human must work his way up the back of an enormous beast, with each creature serving as the equivalent of a "level" in a traditional adventure-platformer. But also significant is the game's use of empty space; vast chunks of the beautifully detailed world are there for absolutely no reason but to look good.

Like *Ico*, *Shadow* raises the bar on videogame beauty, artistry, and storytelling, and we applaud this effort.



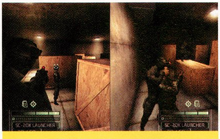
GRAN TURISMO 4

RACING PERFECTION

PUB. Sony CEA **DEV.** Polyphony Digital **OPM SCORE** 5

While most fans would probably argue that *Gran Turismo 4* is the biggest disappointment in the series due to its lack of online play—and any huge additions that are more than cosmetic—it still solidifies the series' position as not only the leader of racing simulators, but also an important part of car culture. Car manufacturers are now fighting to get some kind of representation in the *Gran Turismo* games, making Polyphony's job of selecting an adequate number of desirable cars all the more difficult. Even up to the release of *Gran Turismo 4*, car enthusiast magazines hyped it just as much as any videogame magazine did, giving the series even more mainstream attention than it had gotten before.

But at its core, *Gran Turismo 4* is still about driving, and it's still the best driving simulator on the PlayStation and perhaps on any console. No other game gives as accurate a representation of what it would be like to drive a Mercedes SLR on the world-famous Nürburgring track in Germany—or any other exotic car on a faraway track—and it's that very thing that causes so many driving fans to come back to the series.



TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY

A REVOLUTION IN MULTIPLAYER

PUB. Ubisoft **DEV.** Ubisoft **OPM SCORE** 5

When the success of *Metal Gear Solid* made spy games the Next Big Thing, copycat titles became a virtual certainty. But *Splinter Cell* is not one of these. Based in a much more realistic world than *MGS*, *Splinter Cell* takes the day-after-tomorrow, political-techno thriller style that made Tom Clancy such a significant presence on your dad's bookshelf and makes a very, very good game out of it.

It's not the realistic gameplay that makes *Chaos Theory* (the third *Splinter Cell* game) so significant. It's not the interesting story, or the amazing graphics, or the spectacular voice work by Michael Ironside. It's the multiplayer: *Pandora Tomorrow*, the second game in the series, introduced the unbelievably addictive spy-versus-mercenary competitive play that really raised the bar on multiplayer features. By equipping each side with vastly different gear and abilities, *Pandora*'s developers abandoned the traditional deathmatch and capture-the-flag formulas and created an utterly unique multiplayer experience—one that is carried over intact (with the addition of a few new levels) in *Chaos Theory*.

That fact, combined with *Chaos Theory*'s more coherent story and superior graphics, makes this our pick for *Splinter Cell* games. All are good...but this one's the best.

x18/30
x2
DISMOUNT
SPECTER
JESTER
KILLJOY
SIMPLE

SOCOM 3: U.S. NAVY SEALS

BRINGING THE PS2 ONLINE

PUB. Sony CEA **DEV.** Zipper Interactive **SCORE** 5

You don't have to agree with us about *SOCOM 3* being the best *SOCOM* game. We think it is, what with its vastly larger levels, support for 32 players online, and addition of vehicles and checkpoints and such. But you can take your pick of any of the *SOCOM* games, really. They all have their strengths and flaws, and they all have one major thing in common: They're online in a big way.

The first *SOCOM*, in fact, was the game that launched the PS2's online initiative, and with tens of thousands of people *still* playing this 3-year-old game online—in addition to its two sequels—it's clear the series has carried the bulk of the PS2's online play. Sure, the games have performance issues, as well as issues with players using cheats and exploits to get an artificial leg up. But that shouldn't diminish the fact that the games are extraordinarily addictive, and a real powerhouse online.

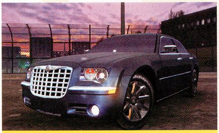
One other element prompts us to choose *SOCOM 3* as the pinnacle of the series: Its single-player campaign is actually entertaining, backing off from the exhausting realism of the first two games. So if you're not online, this is *definitely* the *SOCOM* for you.

DYNASTY WARRIORS 5

EVERYONE'S FAVORITE COMPARISON

PUB. Koei
DEV. Koei
SCORE 3.5

At *OPM*, no other game is used as a comparison more than *Dynasty Warriors*. It's a sure sign of a classic when such associations are made. One former *OPM* editor called *Dynasty Warriors 2* "secretly revolutionary" because it was the first game to feature "one guy on a battlefield of thousands"—gameplay that defines the series. We chose *Dynasty Warriors 5* because if you've never played any of the games, this is the one that covers them all.



MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB EDITION

TUNING CULTURE

PUB. Rockstar **DEV.** Rockstar San Diego **OPM SCORE** 4

Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition has a lot going for it. Its gameplay strikes a nice balance between driving simulation and arcade racing thanks to the way it blends car handling with over-the-top speed and special features that let you slow down time or literally blow cars out of your path. But the most important aspect of *Midnight Club 3* is its absolutely ridiculous level of customization. The garage portion of the game is so robust and so involved that it often requires more time and dedication than the actual racing.

DEVIL MAY CRY 3: DANTE'S AWAKENING

THE RETURN OF THE KING

PUB. Capcom **DEV.** Capcom **OPM SCORE** 4.5

This may seem dramatic, but if *Devil May Cry 3* didn't turn out as well as it did, the series probably would have died, and that would have been a huge shame. Instead, Capcom rose to the challenge of bringing Dante back to his old wise-cracking, gun-blazing self with some of the most challenging action in any game for the PlayStation 2. "[The original *Devil May Cry*] gave birth to Dante, a character loved around the world," says Hiroyuki Kobayashi, the game's producer at Capcom.

TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT

RIGHT GAME, RIGHT TIME

PUB. EA Games **DEV.** Free Radical **OPM SCORE** 5

"Great twitchy FPS action. All about speed, reactions, adrenaline, and packed levels thanks to tons of bots," declares *OPM* contributor Greg Ford of the *TimeSplitters* series. Throw in terrific online play that allows up to 16 players and you have an FPS to rival the *Quake*s of the world. The game's quirky, often funny story line that has players jumping through time and the bonus utility that lets players create and trade maps contribute to *Future Perfect*'s well-deserved status as a PS2 classic.

EYETOY: KINETIC

THE FUTURE OF HOME WORKOUTS

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Sony CEE OPM SCORE 4

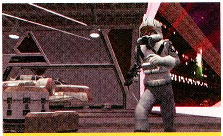
***DDR* became an** accidental workout, but *EyeToy: Kinetic* represents Sony's stab at an intentional one. While exercise programs have been developed for consoles before, this is the first game that uses the EyeToy to supplement a program. The camera not only lets you watch yourself on the TV screen and make sure you're doing the moves correctly, but also evaluates you, which means you can no longer delude yourself into believing a slacker performance is cutting it. Throw out your Jane Fonda tapes—this "game" is the next revolution in home fitness.

RESIDENT EVIL 4

SURVIVAL-HORROR REDEFINED

PUB. Capcom DEV. Capcom OPM SCORE 5

If *Resident Evil 2* is the very embodiment of classic, tense survival-horror, then *Resident Evil 4* is what happens when you punch that body in the face and force its slothful self to adapt to faster and smarter enemies. *RE4* is perhaps the best example of what a sequel can do, in that it changes the core gameplay to stay fresh and relevant while still maintaining the better aspects of the previous game and jettisoning the bad parts. The camera, controls, enemy variety, and boss battles all combine to make a superb action game that turns the series from "survival-horror" into "adrenaline horror."



STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II

IT MIGHT BE BATTLEFIELD STAR WARS BUT IT'S STELLAR

PUB. LucasArts DEV. Pandemic OPM SCORE 4.5

LucasArts is fond of touting *Star Wars Battlefront* as the "best-selling *Star Wars* game of all time." The company may want to stop focusing on numbers and modify that to read "the best *Star Wars* game of all time"—at least on consoles. *Battlefront* lets you live out your *Star Wars* fantasies in squad-based combat using military forces from both trilogies in all the most memorable battles in single-player and online multiplayer. *Battlefront II* introduce "heroes," which include the likes of Luke and Darth.

LUMINES

BECAUSE SOMETIMES SIMPLE IS FUN

PUB. Ubisoft DEV. Q Entertainment OPM SCORE 4

The PSP's launch lineup may have been a little lackluster, but *Lumines* quickly proved itself to be one of the standouts with its simple and addictive play. (In fact, it proved so cracklike that an editor was even heard referring to his PSP as a "*Lumines* machine.") Designer Tetsuya Mizuguchi took a basic puzzle game and enhanced it with a great soundtrack, dazzling graphics, and some excellent head-to-head play. It's a magic combination—one that went a long way toward helping us forget that we didn't have as many games to play as we might have liked.

TEKKEN 5

RULING WITH AN IRON FIST

PUB. Namco DEV. Namco OPM SCORE 4

***Tekken 5* includes** the original arcade *Tekken* as well as the arcade versions of *Tekken 2* and *Tekken 3*. For your fix of any of the older *Tekken* games, you needn't look any further. Plus, it gives you a look at the evolution of the popular fighting series and why it's able to draw in as many mainstream fans as hardcore ones. "By *Tekken 3*, the programmers and artists at Namco had created one of the best fighters ever released on any platform," says Insomniac's Ted Price. "The animations and graphics were superb, but more importantly, it was perfectly tuned."

GRAND THEFT AUTO: LIBERTY CITY STORIES

TAKING THE PSP SERIOUSLY

PUB. Rockstar DEV. Rockstar North OPM SCORE 4.5

Oh, *GTA*. Is there anything you can't do? First you turned a hoary crime drama with subpar graphics into a compelling, open-ended virtual experience. You've consistently raised the bar for writing, acting, freedom, and game design with each sequel. Now you're offering us the chance to revisit the world of *GTA3* on a portable system? With a game every bit as large and involving as its console counterparts, with enhanced graphics, new features, and cool minigames? Plus a fully acted story and customizable soundtrack? Thanks!

LEGO STAR WARS

FOR BEING THE BEST STAR WARS MOVIE GAME

PUB. Eidos

DEV. Traveller's Tales

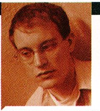
OPM SCORE 4

Lego Star Wars is much more than a cute kids' game. By being the perfect *Star Wars* movie game, it actually accomplishes what LucasArts was never able to do. The problem with the official games based on *Star Wars* movies is that they're usually incredibly faithful to their source material, which means they often have some dull parts. The beauty of *Lego Star Wars* is that it takes out all the boring stuff, giving you a few hours of compact lightsaber fun. Of course, it also doesn't hurt that the little Lego Hayden Christensen is a lot cuter than real Hayden Christensen.

PS1-DERLAND

ALMOST ESSENTIAL

By Jeremy Parish



When he's not trying to reclaim his vanished youth with obsolete games, Jeremy works as 1UP.com's features editor and charming mascot. Check out his blog at toastyfrog.1UP.com.

Publishing a best-of list is a lot like sending the bat signal into the night. Except that instead of summoning a masked crusader for justice, it calls forth a swarm of angry readers who have taken grievous personal offense to the inevitable omissions that go hand-in-hand with a list which is, by nature, exclusive. Reason and rationality are no match for the power of a fanboy slighted.

This issue's Essential 100 boils down the thousands of games available for the PS1, PS2, and PSP to a mere 100 selections, and who am I to dissuade the masses from gathering at the *OPM* gates to protest the gaping holes in our list?

Let me be the first in line to complain. Can you believe that *Sly Cooper* is nowhere to be found? After three games, each better than the last, Sucker Punch's noble raccoon thief gets the shaft. This from a magazine that gave him a two-page retrospective snuggle just a few issues ago. What gives? Why does that soul-patch-wearing creep Jak get a nod while Sly and his far more charming friends (and vastly more entertaining games) are left alone in the night? It just isn't fair.

I'm crushed that *Mega Man Legends* didn't make the list. I still contend that it's one of the most underrated and overlooked games of the 32-bit era.

And what about *Gradius V*? It's an incredible (and incredible-looking) shooter through and through, and unless you hate videogames in general, you have to love it. So why did the good—but not as good as *Gradius V*—*R-Type Delta* make the cut instead? (Because I didn't make the final call on the selections, that's why.)

And so it goes. There are as many different "essential selections" as there are games to choose from. Somewhere out there, someone is seething that *OPM* dared to slight *Steel Harbinger* or *Evergrace*.

> LET ME BE THE FIRST IN LINE TO COMPLAIN.

Someone is furious that we forgot to include Artdink's masterpiece of wandering around aimlessly, *Tail of the Sun*. There's probably even someone sulking in a corner because we didn't give *Punky Skunk* or *Kingsley's Adventure* their due.

Then again, who cares? It's not as though your personal favorites are any worse for being overlooked by *OPM*. Still, I'd be interested to hear about the games you think were unfairly slighted. Drop me a line at jeremy_parish@1UP.com and we can commiserate.

ESSENTIAL 100 CHECKLIST

HOW DOES YOUR COLLECTION STACK UP?

1995

- ☐ Jumping Flash! PS1
- ☐ Raiden Project PS1
- ☐ Ridge Racer PS1
- ☐ Wipeout PS1

1996

- ☐ Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain PS1
- ☐ Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo PS1
- ☐ Twisted Metal 2 PS1

1997

- ☐ Bushido Blade PS1
- ☐ Castlevania: Symphony of the Night PS1
- ☐ Colony Wars PS1
- ☐ Final Fantasy VII PS1
- ☐ PaRappa the Rapper PS1
- ☐ Rage Racer PS1
- ☐ Resident Evil 2 PS1
- ☐ Soul Blade PS1
- ☐ Tomb Raider II PS1

1998

- ☐ Crash Bandicoot 3: Warped PS1
- ☐ Final Fantasy Tactics PS1
- ☐ Gran Turismo PS1
- ☐ Hot Shots Golf PS1
- ☐ Klonoa PS1
- ☐ Metal Gear Solid PS1
- ☐ Oddworld: Abe's Exoddus PS1
- ☐ Spyro the Dragon PS1
- ☐ Suikoden 2 PS1
- ☐ Tenchu: Stealth Assassins PS1
- ☐ Tomba! PS1
- ☐ Xenogears PS1

1999

- ☐ Ape Escape PS1
- ☐ Crash Team Racing PS1
- ☐ Medal of Honor PS1
- ☐ R-Type Delta PS1
- ☐ Silent Hill PS1
- ☐ Street Fighter Alpha 3 PS1
- ☐ Syphon Filter PS1

2000

- ☐ Chrono Cross PS1
- ☐ Persona 2: Eternal Punishment PS1
- ☐ Rayman 2: The Great Escape PS1
- ☐ Smuggler's Run PS2
- ☐ Spider-Man PS1
- ☐ Vagrant Story PS1

2001

- ☐ ATV Offroad Fury PS2
- ☐ Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance PS2
- ☐ Dance Dance Revolution PS2
- ☐ Devil May Cry PS2
- ☐ Final Fantasy X PS2
- ☐ Grand Theft Auto III PS2
- ☐ Ico PS2
- ☐ Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy PS2
- ☐ Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty PS2
- ☐ NBA Street PS2
- ☐ Red Faction PS2
- ☐ SSX Tricky PS2
- ☐ Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 PS2

2002

- ☐ Ace Combat 04: Shattered Skies PS2
- ☐ Fatal Frame PS2
- ☐ Kingdom Hearts PS2
- ☐ The Mark of Kri PS2
- ☐ Medal of Honor: Frontline PS2
- ☐ Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2 PS2
- ☐ Rez PS2

2003

- ☐ .hack//Infection PS2
- ☐ Amplitude PS2
- ☐ Beyond Good & Evil PS2
- ☐ Dark Cloud 2 PS2
- ☐ Freedom Fighters PS2
- ☐ Grand Theft Auto: Vice City PS2
- ☐ High Heat Major League Baseball 2004 PS2
- ☐ Madden NFL 2004 PS2
- ☐ Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time PS2
- ☐ Soul Calibur II PS2
- ☐ Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution PS2
- ☐ World Soccer Winning Eleven 7 PS2
- ☐ Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner PS2

2004

- ☐ Burnout 3: Takedown PS2
- ☐ Final Fantasy XI PS2
- ☐ Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas PS2
- ☐ James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing PS2
- ☐ Katamari Damacy PS2
- ☐ Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater PS2
- ☐ Onimusha 3: Demon Siege PS2
- ☐ Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal PS2
- ☐ Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne PS2
- ☐ Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005 PS2

2005

- ☐ Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening PS2
- ☐ Dynasty Warriors 5 PS2
- ☐ EyeToy: Kinetic PS2
- ☐ God of War PS2
- ☐ Gran Turismo 4 PS2
- ☐ Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories PSP
- ☐ Lego Star Wars PS2
- ☐ Lumines PSP
- ☐ Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition PS2
- ☐ Resident Evil 4 PS2
- ☐ Shadow of the Colossus PS2
- ☐ SOCOM 3: U.S. Navy SEALs PS2
- ☐ Star Wars Battlefront II PS2
- ☐ Tekken 5 PS2
- ☐ TimeSplitters: Future Perfect PS2
- ☐ Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Chaos Theory PS2

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100games.1UP.com

Only one lucky winner will be chosen. Enter as often as you like.

EIC

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

HOMECOMING

PHOTOS: CODY PIKENS

November 2, 2005, a day that will live in PlayStation infamy. Four *OPM* editors-in-chief, in one room, discussed the past, present, and future of the PlayStation and *OPM*—and had a great time doing it. Joining moderator Joe Rybicki were former EICs Wataru Maruyama, Kraig Kujawa, and John Davison, and current EIC Tom Byron. Wat currently works in the marketing department at IGN, Kraig is the lead designer of Midway's *Blitz: The League*, and John is the editorial director for Ziff Davis Media, which publishes *OPM*.

ON CHANGE

JOE RYBICKI: It's been 10 years since the PlayStation launched and over eight years since *OPM* launched. If you look back, what feels the most different to you?

KRAIG KUJAWA: The Mature-rated content and how the industry's wrestling with it. [*Blitz: The League*] couldn't have been done back when I did *OPM*. That sort of entertainment has become more accepted now.

JOHN DAVISON: The gamers are different now. It used to be much more of an enthusiast thing, and people were more forgiving of things and a little more—I don't know if enthusiastic is the right word, but I think that, sort of, people's opinions are more split than they ever were. People are either really into something or absolutely hate things, and because it's gotten so big, you get people with loyalties that are much more pronounced now than they ever used to be. There are the guys that love *GTA* and the guys that hate it. And the guys that hate *GTA* think all the people that love it are bullshit, even though there are 13 million of them.

ON THE PSP

JR: What is the future of the PSP? Is the PSP going to become a game handheld or a movie player?

KK: It needs killer apps. I first heard that *Madden* might be one, and I don't think that happened. I heard that *GTA* would be one and, great game, but they need a game that's great that isn't on the PlayStation 2. The DS has games like *Nintendogs*. And then they did a small little body blow with *Advance Wars*, right? Sony has got to come up with something that is only seen on that system, and I think that's what it takes.

TOM BYRON: I think you can also definitely see the PSP as sort of typical of a PlayStation launch, which is you don't see as many of the hot games early on. But 2005 is the biggest year in terms of the games that are must-have, because we're at that peak in the cycle.

WAT MARUYAMA: We need something designed more for the handheld experience. And even *Lumines* is like, it's the kind of the game I can only enjoy when I can spend a lot of time with it and really get into the music and the rhythm of the puzzle and stuff.

ON THE PS3

JR: What's your take on the PS3? Will it deliver games that look like what was shown at E3?

KK: Is it really going to use the Spider-Man font? Will it have the boomerang controller? [Laughter]

JD: The thing about that *Metal Gear* video is that when you read everyone's response to it, and how much better it looked than the 360, I think what was unique about that was the artistry of it, as opposed to the technology. Kojima's got an eye for camera angles and posing things and lighting things, and if he applied that to the 360 or the Revolution, I'm sure it would look just as impressive. And I think we're getting to the point now where the tech is so good that just to do a 3D engine and a fixed camera and the standard stuff isn't enough. If you want to impress, you've got to…you have to be artists. And you have to approach it the way movie directors do. The PS3 will also probably establish Blu-ray; a lot of people say that the PS2 is responsible for DVDs being so successful so quickly. So I think there's more going on in terms of the big picture for Sony.

WM: Because even in the DVD age, you were getting a deal that the PS2 can play DVDs, but for this next age, the first wave of Blu-ray players that are going to be on the market are like $1,000. And some are more. The PS3, even if it were $600, would be a ridiculous bargain.

KK: Is the PS3 going to have a legitimate online network that's easy to use?

JD: They've said no. Phil Harrison was quoted saying that they're not doing a sort of Live type of thing.

KK: That seems like a huge mistake to me. I mean, there are some advantages to it, but if they aren't going to do that, then how good is the interface for it?

JD: Throughout that you want to be the same person in every game, you don't want to have to desperately scramble to get your name every time you buy a new game. I think the idea is to have it be the gamemakers' responsibility for each community. But what you get is people want to be able to log in to their machines and then that's them, and every game uses that. I mean, what Live has done is set the expectation.

TB: Online is where Xbox has won. And it would seem that, for Sony, it would just be a simple matter of "OK, they did that. Now let's do it better." But it doesn't appear to be that way at this point.

ON MEMORIES

JR: Tell your favorite memory of your time at *OPM*.

PAST OPMERS

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

OPM has seen some great people come and go over the years. We caught up with some of the magazine's former employees to see what they're up to.

MARK MACDONALD

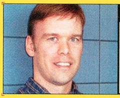
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

BIG HEART: Mark's love of games was just too big to be contained on a single platform. Since leaving his *OPM* buddies, he has been rocking all the consoles and handhelds in his job as executive editor of *Electronic Gaming Monthly*. He also loves the soda pop.

CHRIS BAKER

REVIEWS EDITOR

FORCE-FULL: After spending a little while doing the freelance game journalist thing, C-Bake decided to live the dream of all true *Star Wars* fans around the world by taking a job doing public relations with LucasArts. Now *he* is the master.



GARY MOLLOHAN

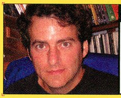
ASSISTANT EDITOR

MARKET SAVVY: Gary went on to edit a magazine dedicated to *Pokémon* trading cards. He currently does training work for a large Chicago-area retailer. However, he just finished grad school and is looking for a marketing job. He doesn't care if his bosses read this.

GARY STEINMAN

MANAGING EDITOR

HOTSHOT: Despite once proclaiming in the pages of this magazine that he hates anime, Gary left *OPM* to take the helm as editor-in-chief of *Newtype USA*, the top anime magazine in the English-speaking world. He now also runs ADV Manga, a book publishing division.



DAN PELUSO

MANAGING EDITOR

DRESS UP: Dan's claim to fame in *OPM* lore is that he appeared on the spines of the May through October 1998 issues wearing his homemade R2-D2 costume. He now works for a website called GamesPress.com and still wears the R2 suit when the mood hits him.

TODD ZUNIGA

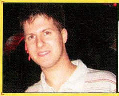
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

ROCK STAR: Todd's been a busy guy since he left *OPM*. First he worked as an associate producer on EA Canada titles like *NBA Street*, then he did some freelance writing, and now he does public relations for the ultimate bad boys, Rockstar Games.

DAVE MALEC

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

NORTHERN EXPOSURE: Tempted by lingonberries and lye-soaked fish, Dave migrated to Minnesota. He is employed as a graphic designer in the marketing department at Crown College. He and his wife, Susan, keep busy chasing their son while awaiting child No. 2.



SAM KENNEDY

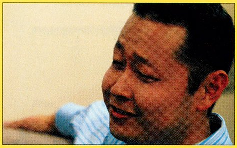
NEWS EDITOR

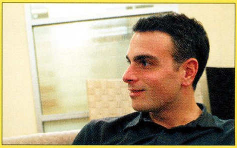
ONLINE GURU: Sam might have left, but he didn't go very far away—in fact, he still works with *OPM* daily in his capacity as the editor-in-chief of 1UP.com, the home of all online deliciousness for our bestest PlayStation love.

DINDO PEREZ

ASSISTANT EDITOR

MIA: Have you seen this man? After dozens of dead-end leads, we have still not been able to locate the elusive Dindo Perez. Is he in retreat on a mountaintop high in the Himalayas? Living the high life as an international playboy? If you know where he is, call us.





KK: I think the two to me were there's an issue where we did Lara Croft in the issue and marketing had us cover up her crotch a little bit more. I remember ESPN had a really cool cover and we kind of took that and put Lara on it and played out the sexiness of her. I really enjoyed that issue. The other thing I really loved was the lead-up to PlayStation 2. That was pretty wild.

> "WE TRIED TO PICK UP A CAR AND MOVE IT INTO THE LOBBY ONCE."

JD: The blue PS2 issue was one I remember really fondly, trying to squeeze everything into it at the last minute and then kicking around different cover ideas. I remember there was one of the *Final Fantasys*; it was *Final Fantasy X*. The original cover concept for that had Alana's logo and it was Friday night, and I had millions of them posted up all over my wall. And people would come in and look at them and go, "Eck. I don't really like any of them." So we went out and drove around for a bit and came back, and then we were like, "OK, we're going to do 'The Girls of *Final Fantasy*,'" and we scrapped everything and took the renders of the three girls, and we did a split-run cover of the three. It was awesome and it sold really well, and it was with, like, half an hour to spare. And it was that kind of thing, when inspiration flashes and everyone buys into it.

TB: *Shadow of the Colossus*—we got so much great buzz. Joe's review got pulled apart I don't know how many different ways. It was a bit of a risk, even for us, but it's the sort of thing that we need to do more often.

WM: My greatest regrets and greatest achievements are things that didn't get on the cover. One of my greatest regrets is that we never put *Klonoa* on the cover.

KK: Joe, what's your favorite moment?

JR: One of the things that always stands out when I think about my time at *OPM*—I want to say it was the *Metal Gear Solid 2* cover, where we stayed at work for 46 hours straight trying to finish this cover story which was the entire history of the *Metal Gear* franchise. And stuff was crashing, and…oh, it was glorious.

KK: I remember when we shouted things at people downstairs as they walked out of their offices. That was good times, too. We were real mature back then.

JR: Back in Lombard [IL], we were in this sort of shantytown office building, and we did a lot of things that we probably shouldn't have done. We would play a game that we called decapatado, and we'd get people on either end of a darkened hallway and try to take off their heads with a flying ring. We tried to pick up a car and move it into the lobby once, and that just didn't work. Good times. This company has changed a lot in the 10 years I've been here.

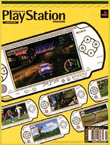
For the full EIC round table, go to OPMroundtable.1up.com.

REWIND

OPM THROUGH THE YEARS

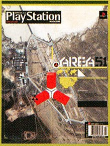
IT IS FINISHED

And now, the moment you've all been waiting for. This is OPM's 100th issue, and the final edition of our sometimes nostalgic, sometimes horrifying, always amusing walk down memory lane, with issues #89 through #99 on the plate this month. Here's to another 100 issues, and thanks for reading.



ISSUE #89: FEBRUARY 2005

Cover story: PSP
Reviewed: *Mercenaries* (4.5/5), *The Getaway: Black Monday* (2/5)
Previewed: *Destroy All Humans!, Batman Begins, Wipeout Pure, Tekken 5*
Most surreal moment: Sitting in a studio with Marilyn Manson and David Duchovny after a recording session for *Area 51*, listening to them try to outraunch each other.

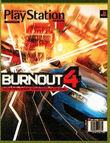


ISSUE #90: MARCH 2005

Cover story: *Area 51*
Reviewed: *Champions: Return to Arms* (4.5/5), *Xenosaga Episode II* (3.5/5)
Previewed: *Metal Gear Acid, Untold Legends, TimeSplitters: Future Perfect*
Most heartwarming story: Gaming web comic Penny Arcade raises nearly half a million dollars in its second annual Child's Play holiday charity drive.

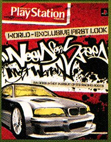
ISSUE #91: APRIL 2005

Cover story: PSP Launch
Reviewed: *Gran Turismo 4* (5/5), *TimeSplitters: Future Perfect* (5/5), *Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening* (4.5/5)
Previewed: *Castlevania: Curse of Darkness, Killer 7, Enthusia, Death, Jr., Fantastic 4*
Most questionable quote: "I wouldn't rule [homebrew PSP software] out completely in the future." —Kaz Hirai, president, SCEA



ISSUE #92: MAY 2005

Cover story: *Burnout Revenge*
Reviewed: *God of War* (5/5), *Tekken 5* (4/5), *Metal Gear Acid* (4/5), *Lego Star Wars* (4/5)
Previewed: *Soul Calibur III, SOCOM 3: U.S. Navy SEALs, The Matrix: Path of Neo*
Yeah, right: "We don't intend to have young people play our game and immediately go out and join the Army." —Maj. Chris Chambers, head of the *America's Army* project

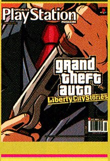


ISSUE #93: JUNE 2005

Cover story: *Need for Speed: Most Wanted*
Reviewed: *Wipeout Pure* (4/5), *Enthusia: Professional Racing* (2.5/5), *NARC* (.5/5)
Previewed: *Star Wars Battlefront II, Burnout Legends, Ratchet: Deadlocked, Jak X*
Best George Lucas dig: "He's sort of gone off into his own world, like Montezuma." —John Milius, writer, *Apocalypse Now* (and *Medal of Honor: European Assault*)

ISSUE #94: JULY 2005

Cover story: *SOCOM 3: U.S. Navy SEALs*
Reviewed: *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* (3/5), *Stolen* (3/5)
Previewed: *Black, We Love Katamari, Guitar Hero, Shadow of the Colossus*
Most disturbing quote: "You'll see the gun as really cool and sexy—we want to glamorize this experience." —Jeremy Chubb, *Black* executive producer, on "gun porn"

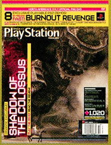


ISSUE #95: AUGUST 2005

Cover story: *GTA: Liberty City Stories*
Reviewed: *Psychonauts* (4/5), *Medal of Honor: European Assault* (4/5), *Destroy All Humans!* (3/5), *Killer 7* (2.5/5)
Previewed: *The Warriors, Okami, Bully*
Most exhilarating quote: "We've barely scratched the surface of what [PS3] can do." —Mark Rein, Epic Games vice president, on the amazing PS3 *Unreal* tech demo

ISSUE #96: SEPTEMBER 2005

Cover story: *Kingdom Hearts II*
Reviewed: *Batman Begins* (3/5), *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction* (4.5/5)
Previewed: *SSX on Tour, King Kong, Prince of Persia 3, Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks*
Most unpleasantly accurate quote: "[The PSP is] being treated like a Goodwill store where developers drop off bare-bones ports and shoddy, old games."



ISSUE #97: OCTOBER 2005

Cover story: *Shadow of the Colossus*
Reviewed: *Radiata Stories* (3.5/5), *MediEvil Resurrection* (4/5),
Previewed: *Resident Evil 4, SSX on Tour, Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII*
Most embarrassing moment: Modders find a sex minigame mistakenly left in *San Andreas*; Rockstar claims the bit (complete with voice acting) is the work of hackers.

ISSUE #98: NOVEMBER 2005

Cover story: *Soul Calibur III*
Reviewed: *Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves* (4.5/5), *We Love Katamari* (4.5/5), *Guitar Hero* (4.5/5), *Burnout Revenge* (5/5)
Previewed: *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence, Tony Hawk's American Wasteland, Fatal Frame III: The Tormented*
Best line, hands down: "I hit him so hard he fell off the Internet." —Penny Arcade

ISSUE #99: DECEMBER 2005

Cover story: *King Kong*
Reviewed: *SOCOM 3: U.S. Navy SEALs* (5/5), *GTA: Liberty City Stories* (4.5/5)
Previewed: *Rogue Galaxy, 50 Cent: Bulletproof, Metal Gear Acid 2*
Most disturbing aging of a character in a major game franchise: The introduction of a gray-haired, mustachioed Solid Snake in *Metal Gear Solid 4* for PS3.

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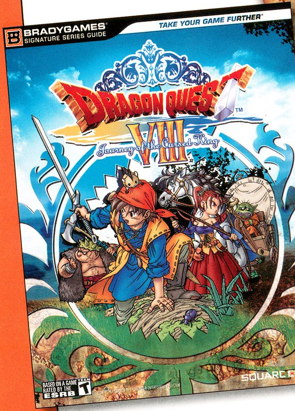
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